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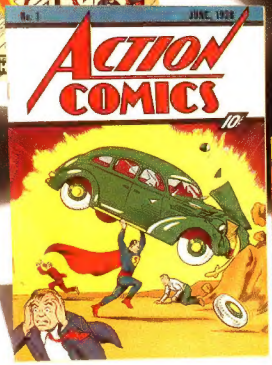

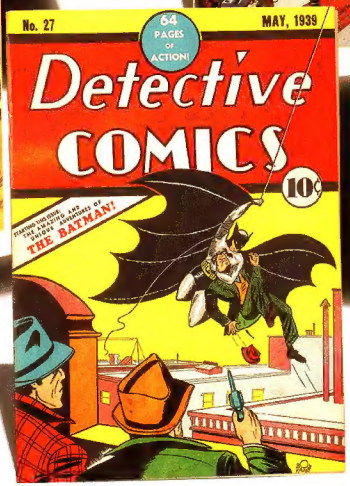

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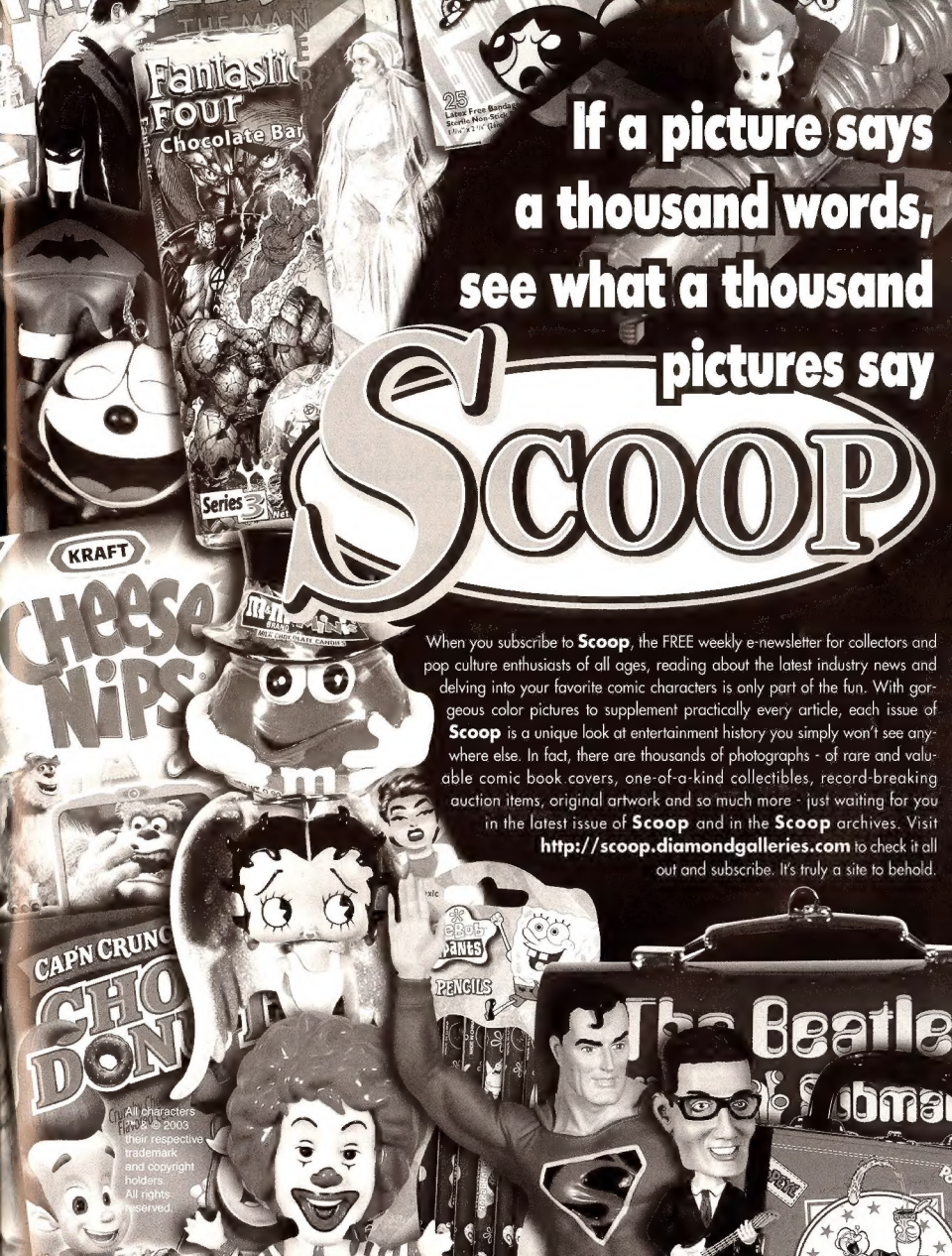
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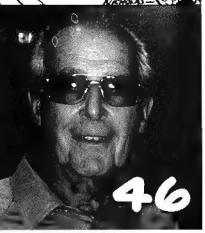

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Letters start here!

Coin a phrase

I have been taking *CBM* since about issue 60. Up until this latest issue, I have continued to enjoy the magazine despite the recent change in management. I have especially enjoyed the features on strip art and think that they add a lot to the magazine. But with the current issue, #105, you went over the line. Please explain to me what Liberty Head nickels have to do with comics? There was a very weak attempt to link the story to comics when Steve Geppi claimed that "Uncle Scrooge is the quintessential coin collector." And there was one shot of some very rare comics located at Diamond International Galleries. But these comics had nothing to do with a story on—what was it again—oh yeah, nickels. I have nothing against coin collecting, but that is not what *CBM* is about. This story was a waste of four pages. Please, stick to comics and comic-related material. When you do that, the magazine is usually quite good. Thanks,

Todd Kvamme
Los Gatos, CA

First, I'd like to thank you for buying CBM *and for writing in with your opinion. Take a look at Dr. Richard Olson's response to the same article [page 6] and you can see what I was shooting for.*

We at Gemstone are very interested in and dedicated to the art form we call the "comics." We want to see it flourish and prosper as it did in the "good old days" of my childhood in the 1940s and '50s. We believe that comics are good for kids for many reasons. Personally, I know that reading comics as a kid helped me have a better vocabulary.

Kids. Right now there are about 20 million kids in this country between the ages of 6 and 10, another 20 million between age 11 and age 15, and so on. Out of this potential pool of at least 40 million readers, there are no more comic books or comic strips that can claim to have more than a million readers, and that's stretching it. What are those other 39 million kids doing? Whatever it is, they're not reading comics. Some collect sports memorabilia, some collect coins and some collect stamps. All of these, including collecting comics, are rooted in our nostalgia for the past.

So, in an effort to gain more comics readers, at the recent American Numismatic Association meeting in Baltimore, Gemstone set up a booth where we gave away thousands of copies of our History of Comic Characters *and thousands of free Disney comics to anyone who asked for them. In addition, Steve Geppi, Diamond Comic Distributors and Gemstone Publishing hosted a party at Diamond International Galleries, so many of the top coin collectors can see that we are just as serious about our comics collecting. A large display of comicdom's best-known coin collector, Scrooge McDuck was mounted in the form of original oil paintings by the late Carl Barks.*

A "holy grail" for a comic book collector could be a pristine copy of Action Comics *#1, for a sports collector it might be the ball or bat that the Babe used for that 60th home run. It might be a Liberty nickel or a $20 gold piece for the coin collector or an upside-down airmail stamp for the stamp collector. These areas of collecting interest have many things in common, so one of the best places to find and develop new comic collectors is to start looking in these other areas. Haven't you noticed the trend with auction houses now to include coins, comics,*

[continued in ***Marketplace Mail****, page 6]*

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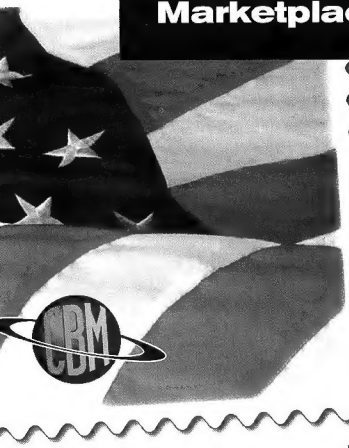

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[continued from ***Letter from the Editor****, page 4]*

sports memorabilia, movie posters, etc. in their offerings to the world of collectors?

So, we're just trying to spread the word to the entire collecting community that it's fun and it's educational to collect comics, that's all. We think that reaching out like this can only enhance everyone's collecting enjoyment.

Spoken like the old Professor that I am,

Russ Cochran

I have enjoyed being a collector/dealer/academician in the field of comics for over 50 years. During that time, I feel that there have only been a handful of true watershed events that have strengthened our hobby. The first was the national publication of fanzines and classified ads such as *The Rocket's Blast*, *The Comic Collector*, and *Alter Ego*. They brought the core collectors all over America together to really create a unified hobby. The second was the development of the specialized comic store as exemplified by Collectors Bookstore in Hollywood, CA; it was not only the first great store, at its zenith it was the best store ever created, and demonstrated that such a business could be viable. The third was the synthesis of information and prices into a single source by Bob Overstreet when he published *The Comic Book Price Guide* and elevated the business end of the hobby to the same working level found in coin collecting and stamp collecting.

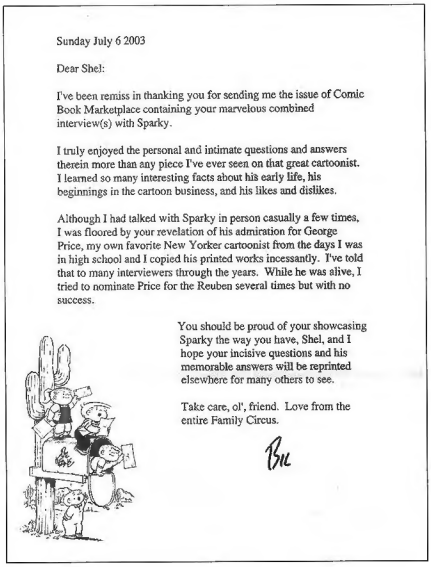
After reading "The Ninety Years of Liberty Gala: A Night in Pictures" in *CBM* #106, I believe that another watershed event has occurred in comics. Steve Geppi, John Snyder, and everyone connected with the event have performed a great service for our hobby. By holding a gala celebration around one of the most fabled coins in existence, the 1913 Liberty Head nickel, in the beautiful setting of Diamond Galleries, a new level of collector was exposed to our hobby. By juxtaposing the nickel against Uncle Scrooge, the work of Carl Barks, and high-grade rare comics, the visitors were able to personally see the best that our hobby had to offer. Further, when a collector of the status of Kerby Confer could attend and tell his friends that in addition to owning a block of four of the "Inverted Flying Jenny" stamps appraised at $3.5 million dollars, he also owned a number of Barks' oils featuring the ducks, he helped give our hobby credibility and potentially generate new collectors. I can't think of anything that could have been done that would have more effectively raised the status of our field in the thoughts of people who collect coins and stamps. Further, I think it is essential for the hobby of comics to continue to grow and develop and strive to be on par with stamps and coins if it is to enjoy a robust future. This was a great night for comics!

Richard D. Olson
Poplarville, MS

Sharing is good

I sent out several copies of *CBM* #100 to friends. Here are two responses *[this and next page]* I'm proud of.

Shel Dorf



Sunday July 6 2003

Dear Shel:

I've been remiss in thanking you for sending me the issue of Comic Book Marketplace containing your marvelous combined interview(s) with Sparky.

I truly enjoyed the personal and intimate questions and answers therein more than any piece I've ever seen on that great cartoonist. I learned so many interesting facts about his early life, his beginnings in the cartoon business, and his likes and dislikes.

Although I had talked with Sparky in person casually a few times, I was floored by your revelation of his admiration for George Price, my own favorite New Yorker cartoonist from the days I was in high school and I copied his printed works incessantly. I've told that to many interviewers through the years. While he was alive, I tried to nominate Price for the Reuben several times but with no success.

You should be proud of your showcasing Sparky the way you have, Shel, and I hope your incisive questions and his memorable answers will be reprinted elsewhere for many others to see.

Take care, ol', friend. Love from the entire Family Circus.

Bil

Mickey errata

One small but necessary correction to my Jack Bradbury interview (*CBM* #103): on page 64, left column, penultimate line, it is said that Jim Fletcher inked Bradbury's art. The actual inker's name is Ellis Eringer (as correctly reported within the checklist, on page 68). By the way, Fletcher was another profile penciler of Disney stories for the "Overseas Studio Program," which were mostly inked by Eringer himself.

Another small correction is due concerning Ray Chan's *Mickey Mouse Weekly* article. On page 33, "Shuffled Symphonies" is mentioned as a series which appeared "in the post-war era." Not quite. "Shuffled Symphonies" (by "A. Merrimaker," indeed a pen-name for Basil Reynolds) appeared from issues 1 (Feb 8, 1936) to 214 (Mar 9, 1940), so it was all pre-war, right?

Alberto Becattini
Florence, Italy

A note to Nolan

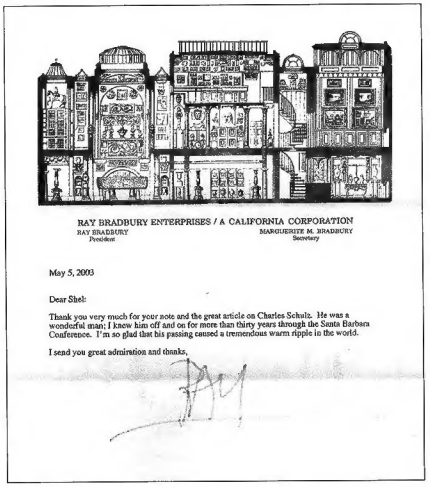
Michelle Nolan often comes up with the *best* esoteric info in comics history! I'm glad to answer a question she pondered! She wonders why Aquaman and Green Arrow lasted through the '50s but Green Lantern, Flash and Hawkman vanished in *All Star* #57. I would suggest "burnout." Hawkman never did have his own title in the '40s, instead appearing in all 57 *All Stars*!

While key players get stale by too many stories, back-up features like Aquaman and "Arrow" are mercifully short! The expectations of sales on back-up features are mercifully short!

Richard M. Brown
Detroit, MI

Inquiring mind

For quite a while I considered giving up on *CBM*, but the past few issues have changed my mind. The focus seems to be returning to comic books. I find it very annoying that a few enthusiasts of other collectibles can weasel their way into almost completely taking over a magazine that was, and should still be, devoted to comic books. I suppose these people know that a magazine about their aspects of collecting just wouldn't make it. But enough about that. This letter was sent to find out about the following:



RAY BRADBURY ENTERPRISES / A CALIFORNIA CORPORATION
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May 5, 2003

Dear Shel:

Thank you very much for your note and the great article on Charles Schulz. He was a wonderful man; I knew him off and on for more than thirty years through the Santa Barbara Conference. I'm so glad that his passing caused a tremendous warm ripple in the world.

I send you great admiration and thanks,

1. Will there be more stickers down the road to help fill in those gaps in the *Photo-Journal Guides*?

2. Will there be an updated list of comics that supposedly "do not exist" along with those that have been proven to exist?

3. Can there be a new feature added to the magazine entitled something like "The Canadian Connection"? There seems to be a great interest of late in Canadian editions and publications both recent and past. In my mind, Doug Sulipa would be perfect to write such a column.

4. Will the "Complete E.C. Library" ever be completed?

I guess that's it for now. Keep up the (recent) good work.

Lanny F. Cox
Ontario, Canada

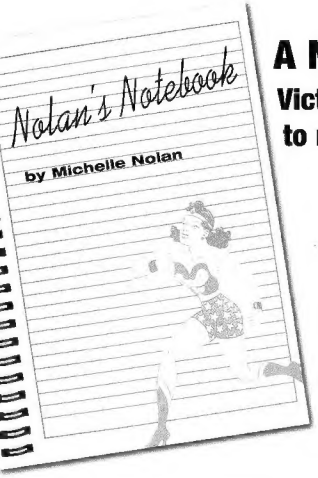
I'm glad to hear we are doing better. What we do is this: We branch out a little bit into some adjacent area of collecting, like original art or Big Little Books or pulps or newspaper comics. And then we see what happens. Our readers tell us now that they like certain of these features, and we are still trying to find out which ones are good for CBM *and which are not. It is letters like yours and the others on this page that decides the final content of each issue. Thanks for your critique and for caring enough to write. Here are answers to your questions:*

1. Yes, there will be more stickers. We put stickers in our latest Special Edition on Spider-Man. Should we put stickers in each issue? It would have to cost more if we do. Readers, what do you say?

2. Michelle Nolan, among others, keeps up with the issue of whether a certain comic listed in the Guide *exists or not. This information is sprinkled throughout her columns. Would you like to see it gathered all together as an article in* CBM*?*

3. I'd say probably not. The English collectors raise the same point—should we be giving more space to Canadian and English comics? And most of the mail we have received has said "No." At the heart of comic collecting is recapturing the nostalgic aura of the past, trying to preserve the magic things we read when we were children.

4. I hope so! Although "finished" is a relative term—do you mean including Tiny Tot, Moon Girl, Fat and Slat *and other pre-1947 EC titles? Probably not, although the original art still exists for it. If you mean Picto-Fiction, the answer* *[continued on page 12]*



A Not-So-Famous Fox First

Victor Fox was the first publisher to revive super-heroes

Victor Fox must have confused a good many readers during the Golden Age.

The self-styled "King of the Comics," as the controversial businessman called himself according to those who were there, was the first publisher to come up with the idea of reviving super-heroes.

Fox's timing was poor, though, and his finances apparently were even worse, or history might treat this erratic, much-disliked comic book impresario a mite more kindly.

Granted, less time went by in Fox's revivals of Green Mask and Blue Beetle than would normally be thought of as a genuine rebirth. Nor did his creative crew change the costumes, or at least no more than Fox's poorly paid, inconsistent and often inept artists changed the costumes throughout the 12-year history of Fox Feature Publications.

Even so, the Fox revivals should be considered more than a historic footnote. Blue Beetle's revival, at least, was a genuine precursor to DC's famed revivals of the 1950s and '60s, and to lesser-known mid-1950s efforts from Marvel and Ajax-Farrell.

Fox at least should be credited with being willing to try the concept, even though his notable lack of success indicates that he probably had no effect on any other comic book creators with regard to reviving super-heroes.

The Fox super-heroes have been well-chronicled through the years by comic book historians. Two of the "founding fathers" of fandom, Jerry Bails and the late Howard Keltner, already had Fox thoroughly indexed by the late 1960s.

Many collectors, though, still don't realize what an impact Fox had on the industry in its early days, in large part because super-hero factories such as Fawcett, Timely and Quality soon far surpassed Fox, both in far superior quality and sheer number of costumed hero features.

In the second half of 1939 and 1940, though, Fox was second only to DC, his former employer and then operating as National Comics, when it came to cranking out costume hero concepts. In fact, by the end of 1939—just before DC began to unleash a flood of innovative heroes—Fox had more super-heroes than DC for a brief period.

Even in 1940, the year super-heroes began to flood the newsstands, Fox published more comic books (67) than anyone but DC/All-American (86) and Dell (79). Just to show how new the field was in 1940—both with and without super-heroes—publishing icons-to-be such as Fawcett (37) and Marvel (25) were producing only two or three comics a month on the average!

Indeed, all of Fox's 1939 and 1940 comics were super-hero-centered. Nitpickers will point out that the 1940 one-shot *Rex Dexter of Mars* was technically not a super-hero, but I doubt if readers of the era made a differentiation.

Interestingly, all of these classic 1939 Fox Feature Publications concepts—The Flame, The Blue Beetle, The Green Mask and Samson—eventually would be revived, albeit briefly, after Fox left the business temporarily in late 1941, with the last issues of his original comic book line dated February 1942.

Holyoke Publishing Co., the Captain Aero and Catman folks, published *Blue Beetle* in 1942-44 while Fox was away from the comic book scene serving in the military during World War II. But the rest of the major Fox heroes faded into limbo, all but Green Mask for good, though backup characters V-Man, Black Fury and The Gorilla hung on for a while in Holyoke's first few issues of the *Blue Beetle*.

When the original Fox comics disappeared from the newsstands, those who cared about them—or even noticed the demise of Fox amid the flood of comics on the stands early in 1942—may have thought *Blue Beetle* was gone forever following #11 (Feb 1942). Holyoke, though, used some leftover Fox inventory to resume publishing the character—after a four-month gap—with #12 (Jun 1942).

It wasn't long before the Blue Beetle character changed drastically under Holyoke, most notably with a costumed aide named Sparky in #15 who inexplicably underwent a name change to Spunky with #18. The kid appeared only in the Holyoke issues, which ended with #30 (Feb 1944). Oddly, though, Sparky was introduced with a huge splash on the cover of #14, but was nowhere to be found inside!

Blue Beetle was far and away Fox's most successful concept, as reflected by Holyoke's publishing schedule. *Blue Beetle* was basically bimonthly under Fox for its first 11 issues, but Holyoke produced its 19 issues in a 21-month span. It is, in fact, a bit mind-blowing to realize that *Blue Beetle* was a monthly during the early years of World War II, while *Batman* and *Superman* remained bi-monthlies! Of course, during his Holyoke days, the only place Blue Beetle could be found was in his own title.

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Still—

Blue Beetle *was* Fox's most successful creation. He first appeared in *Mystery Men* #1 (Aug 1939), running in all 31 issues, and also appeared in *Big Three* #1-7, which was a Fox super hero display concept that predated DC's similar *Comic Cavalcade*.

Before we move on to Blue Beetle's unique three-issue revival in 1950, we have to tackle the unusual case of Green Mask. Readers who last saw Green Mask in his own title with #9 (Feb 1942) must have been startled to see him reappear with #10 (Aug 1944), two months after Victor Fox triumphantly returned to publishing his own comics with *Blue Beetle* #31 (Jun 1944).

Fox thus made Green Mask the first Golden Age hero to return following a significant absence. As far as I know, however, Green Mask's kid partner, Domino the Miracle Boy, did not return with him in any of the 1944-46 stories, although I don't have all those issues. Howard Keltner's magnificent and invaluable *Golden Age Comic Books Index*, to which I refer often, does not indicate any 1944-46 appearance of Domino.

Domino was, apparently, one of Fox's classic knockoffs this time, one he got away with! Domino was introduced in the Green Mask story in *Mystery Men* #11 (Jun 1940), two months after the appearance of Robin the Boy Wonder in the Batman story in *Detective Comics* #38 (Apr 1940). Domino did not appear in *Mystery Men* #12 and 13, but returned for the rest of the title's run in #14-31.

Would it be fair to conjecture that Fox had gotten wind of Robin's creation—or at least rushed into print a knockoff after seeing *Detective* #38? After all, Green Mask himself was pretty much a knockoff of Batman, even though the character apparently was different enough that DC did not order Fox to cease publication. Remember that Fox's 14-page Wonderman strip, created by Will Eisner under Fox's special commission for *Wonder Comics* #1, was ordered out of existence by DC—after only one appearance—as a blatant Superman imitation.

At any rate, when Fox revived *Green Mask* with #10, the character appeared regularly in his own title and nowhere else in 1944-46, similar to the way Fox handled Blue Beetle. Green Mask stories did appear in the World War II Fox giants *Everybody's Comics*, *Book of All Comics*, *All Great Comics*, and *All Good Comics*, but these Green Mask stories may have been reprints.

The Revival issue, #58 (Apr 1950) continued from #57 (Jul 1948)

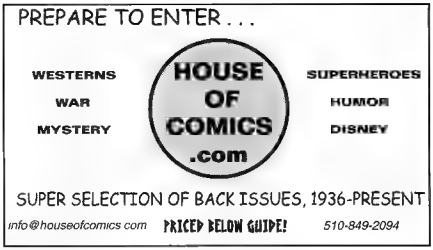
The Green Mask revival lasted eight issues, listed as #10-11, Vol. 2 #1 through 4, and #5-6, with the last issue dated Oct-Nov 1946. *Green Mask* #11 and Vol. 2 #2 contained only one Green Mask story; the other six issues had two stories.

Here's another noteworthy fact about Fox: Only two of those eight *Green Mask* revival issues, #10 and Vol. 2 #3, had 52 pages, just as *Blue Beetle* dropped to 36 pages with #37 (Spring 1945) for the remainder of its run, except for #38 and 41.

Fox was, in a word, cheap. Several small publishers dropped their page counts to 36 late in World War II—a drastic cut at the time—but almost all of the major publishers continued with 52-page issues. Yet when Fox published all those notorious crime and jungle comics in 1947-50, they were almost all only 36 pages (including the covers), while most comics of the period still were 52 pages.

Fox also, after a fashion, "revived" Phantom Lady by obtaining the rights in 1947 for her appearances in her own Fox title (#13-23) and *All Top Comics* (#8-13). Phantom Lady (a.k.a Sandra Knight) first appeared in Quality's *Police Comics* #1-23 and also guest-starred in the Spider Widow stories in *Feature Comics* #69-71.

Phantom Lady, though, had not been seen in four years before she unexpectedly returned in *Phantom Lady* #13 (Aug 1947). Since Phantom Lady had never been more than a six-page Quality backup feature in *Police*, my



guess is that the majority of readers who spotted the new Fox version had never heard of the character.

Besides, the outrageous way Fox presented Phantom Lady contrasted greatly from Quality's more sedate version. So, unlike the Green Mask and Blue Beetle revivals, Phantom Lady was basically a new character. Even so, give Fox credit for yet another super-hero revival of sorts, even though the return of Phantom Lady lasted only a couple of years, about the same length of time Green Mask's revived version survived on the newsstands.

Fox's turbulent financial conditions may have had as much to do with *Green Mask*'s demise as lack of sales. Fox titles were often published erratically in 1944-46. Indeed, when *Green Mask* disappeared for good with Vol. 2 #6 (Oct-Nov 1946), Fox also apparently intended to cancel *Blue Beetle* at about the same time with #44 (Sep-Oct 1946).

There already had been a clerical error actually uncommon in the Fox organization that resulted in the lack of a *Blue Beetle* #43 being published. This error plagued indexers for years, along with greatly bothering Blue Beetle completists although how many of those can there be?! *Blue Beetle* #41 was dated March–April 1946, and #42 was dated July-August 1946, but there was no May June issue and no #43 was issued. Given the lack of a May June issue, this confused collectors for years until Keltner figured it out for his index, even though Ernie Gerber left an empty spot for #43 in his *Photo-Journal*.

Regardless of the error, *Blue Beetle* disappeared from the newsstands for seven months. Fox then resumed the *Blue Beetle* series with #45 (Jun 1947), shortly before the first Fox issue of *Phantom Lady*, and used the same infamous crime and exploitation themes in both titles.

"Return of America's No. 1 Hero—In Stirring Adventures Every Month" was the cover blurb on *Blue Beetle* #45. Fox must have thought the burgeoning market in crime comics would make Blue Beetle once again a success, since Fox did, indeed, impulsively publish him monthly from #45-57 (Jun 1947-Jul 1948), skipping only June 1948.

In retrospect, this was one of the most astonishing business decisions in the history of comics. Superman and Batman were still being published bi-monthly! For that matter, Phantom Lady was a bi-monthly throughout her 11-issue run, which ended with #23 (Apr 1949). Perhaps that's why *Phantom Lady* lasted longer, not to mention Matt Baker's wonderful art. Who knows?

Blue Beetle's covers turned increasingly exploitive through #52 (Jan 1948), although at least our hero was still prominently featured on the covers. At that point—in one of the oddest decisions in comic book history—Fox continued to run two full-length Blue Beetle stories in each issue, yet turned the covers into gruesome displays for his true-crime stories. Indeed, the Blue Beetle's only cover role in #53-57 was a mug shot explaining that he was the "narrator" of the crime story!

And I'll bet you thought it was odd that the Golden Age Green Lantern was replaced on the cover of his own title by his dog, Streak, for three late issues!

Blue Beetle stories—apparently leftover inventory that Fox did not want to waste—appeared in *Zegra Jungle Empress* #1 (Aug 1948) and *Zago Jungle Prince* #1 (Sep 1948).

Blue Beetle, though, wasn't done yet, thanks to the strange, untimely decisions of Fox and his editors. In 1950—when leading publishers had either largely abandoned super-heroes or were still in the process of doing so. Fox brought back *Blue Beetle* with #58 (Apr). The cover, showing Blue Beetle breaking through the front page of an extra edition of *The Daily Record*, proclaimed *Blue Beetle Returns!* (Charlton also used this cover, slightly changed, for its first Blue Beetle appearance in *Space Adventures* #13 in 1954.)

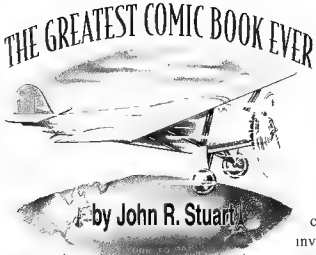
Blue Beetle, then, qualifies as the first true revival of a Golden Age hero and he reappeared more than six years before an updated version of The Flash returned in DC's *Showcase* #4.

Blue Beetle's revival, though, lasted only three issues. Issue #59 was dated June and #60 was dated August. We'll never know whether Blue Beetle would have, or could have, continued on his own merits, slim though they may have been. Fox shut down his entire comic line with issues dated August and September 1950, making only a brief comeback a year later before vanishing from the comic scene for good.

The brief Blue Beetle revival presented fresh material, albeit some of the poorest work available on the stands at the time. In the first story in #58 reintroducing Blue Beetle and his girlfriend, reporter Joan Mason, one of the crooks mutters, "The Blue Beetle! I thought he had disappeared for good! Nobody's heard or seen anything of him for almost two years!"

It was a rare nod to continuity in a Fox comic. The stories in *Blue Beetle* #58-60, though, were written in a style that seemed primitive compared to the DC, Fawcett and Quality productions of the era, and the art was abysmal, unlike the elegantly effective work Matt Baker rendered on Phantom Lady. In addition, the Blue Beetle stories in these three revival issues were incredibly wordy and crowded the panels beyond almost anything being produced in comics at the time.

These comics are worth collecting primarily as curiosities—certainly not for their quality! But they do represent historic trivia.



Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD #3

Jim Steranko's Version of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*

Letters flow together, stretch, elongate and blur. Colors merge and metamorphose into mind-bending palettes. At first you'll likely believe I'm describing the wild, psychedelic rock posters of the late 1960s. Works by the likes of Alton Kelley, Stanley Mouse or Rick Griffin, but what I'm describing is the evolutionary, mind expanding art of Jim Steranko from his ground breaking work on *Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD* from Marvel comics.

Jim Steranko began his psychedelic comic experiments when he was involved with the art on Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. in *Strange Tales*, but he hit his prime when the book was given its own title in the summer of 1968. While his work in *Strange Tales* was brilliant, his work on *Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD* was spectacular

Many fans of Steranko hold up the seven covers he produced for this series as some of the finest work he ever produced, and the interiors he drew for issues 1, 2, 3 and 5 are nothing less than breathtaking. One look at the covers of issues 1 and 5 show clear evidence of the West Coast poster influence and the blue, black and white cover to issue 4 is Modern Psychedelic Pop art at its best. Borrowing the best elements from the world of Salvador Dali, Jim crafted the cover for issue 7, producing a now classic cover, with its melting floors, twisted clocks and distorted stick people.

But for me the best issue of Steranko's short psychedelic experiment was issue 3.

Rick Griffin classic psychedelic concert poster—**Bill Graham Presents** #136, known as the Heart & Torch poster. From the concert at the Fillmore West, San Francisco, September 12-14, 1968, featuring Big Brother and the Holding Company, Santana and Chicago Transit Authority.

Considering that I didn't want to open this book, let alone read it, I procrastinated and before I knew it I was behind the rest of the class and my first assignment was late. I was held up to

Nick Fury #3 cover.

In the fall of 1968 I had moved up from elementary school to high school, a nerve-wracking experience to be sure. I can vividly remember sitting in English class while the teacher handed out four different novels to the class, our first exposure to classic English literature. I picked up the book I'd received, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and thought, "This book looks boooring!" If I'd ever made the mistake of judging a book by its cover this was it. I wished I'd been handed one of the other texts, but no—I was stuck with Sherlock Holmes and the Baskervilles.

scorn by the teacher and thoroughly embarrassed. So that night I started into the Baskervilles and by about page nine I was convinced this was going to be a difficult read. The early part of the novel tells of Holmes and Watson performing their analysis of a mysterious visitor, one Doctor Mortimer. But then, Mortimer arrives and is soon regaling Holmes and Watson with the "The Curse of the Baskervilles."

Now this was starting to get better, actually it was exciting and that was when I realized that this legend of the Gigantic Hell Hound seemed familiar.

Nick Fury #3 page 3, the Hound (detail).

I jumped up and dashed into my closet where my hoard of Marvel comic books was stashed, safe from the grubby fingers of my younger brother. I immediately pulled out my copy of *Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD*, and sure enough there on the gorgeous Steranko cover was the dreaded Hound.

Well, this was a good excuse to leave Arthur Conan Doyle for a while and read one of my favorite comics and then I again tackled *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, this time with far more enthusiasm. If Doyle could inspire the great Jim Steranko then his writing was OK with me. That time with Doyle's novel has truly become one of my favorites, but Steranko's version will always take precedence.

There's no reference in the comic to Doyle's story, but there's never been any doubt that Steranko's "Dark Moon Rise, Hell Hound Kill" is based upon what is perhaps the best of the Sherlock Holmes stories. Jim took liberties with the original story, moving it from the moors of Dartmoor, England to the misty moors of Scotland. He modifies the "Legend of the Hound" slightly, but for all intents and purposes it's the same as the Doyle version. A blood-filled tale of murder, with a brutish husband and beautiful, terror stricken bride and a giant Hound. The killer in Doyle's story was Hugo Baskerville and in Steranko's version he changes the name to Hugh Revenlock.

Otherwise Steranko's comic book version is a completely different tale, featuring murder, séances, haunted castles, ghostly attacks, Nazi U-boats and of course the giant Hound. A rousing tale to be sure.

The artwork certainly didn't disappoint either. It bears his trademark pop art, psychedelic style, but Jim modified his approach, softened it, and created a true noir, Gothic feel. The cover is a standout, with its blood red sky, stark tower and a child being pursued by the Hound. This is gothic art at its best and I believe this cover inspired many of the great DC Gothic romance covers of the early '70s. The covers of *Dark Mansion of Forbidden Love* and *Sinister House of Secret Love* are drawn in the same tradition.

But, it's Steranko's interior art that elevates this book above the norm. The splash page, a blood red nightmare scene, sets the tone for the entire book. Pages two and three are a classic two-page Steranko spread, which depicts a murder by the Hound with a series of scenes displayed in the oversized text The man is pursued through the scene and killed in six miniature poses set into the text, while in the background the Hound raises his howls to the moon Steranko leaves out many of his psychedelic techniques, but he does use monochromatic panels to their utmost and Nick's battle scenes with the ghost are done almost exclusively in grays and blues to emphasis the spectral atmosphere.

Is *Nick Fury, AOS* #3 the best book produced by Jim Steranko? Perhaps not, but for me during the hot fall of 1968 it brought to life a classic novel from early in the century and taught me to love the work of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

Marketplace Mail

[continued from page 7]

is a definite Yes. If you mean the 3-D issues, it's a solid Maybe. Technical problems, y'know.

RC

Our besters, our worsters

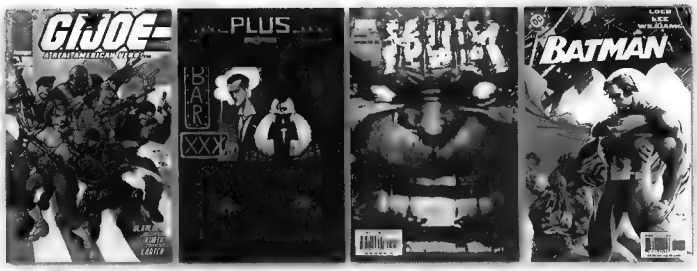
Regarding *CBM* #105, I believe the Simpson's Comic Guy says it best, "WORST ISSUE EVER!" Did you guys have a bet over there to see how many interviews you could possibly squeeze into a single issue of *CBM*? Come on, eight interviews is a bit ridiculous, don't you think? The absolute worst interview was the one you could not even get with Jeff Jones. So instead of scrubbing that interview you decide to interview a friend of his?!?!? What are you guys thinking? Gary Carter please come back, these guys are lost without you!

West Stephan
Granada Hills, CA

Ouch! Well, I was looking for a common thread between some of the newer and more talented comic artists I have long been impressed with the talent of Bernie Wrightson, Michael Kaluta, Jeff Jones, Bruce Jones and the other "young turks," as I called them. Through the interviews I wanted the readers to see how their minds work, and how they arrived at the place they are now, and who was an inspiration to them in the world of comic art. I'll bet we have a lot of readers who can empathize with these artists and who enjoy hearing the stories of how they got their first jobs, etc. And you are correct about the Jeff Jones interview, because I felt like the issue would be wrong to ignore his work, and David Spurlock, who publishes all those great Vanguard Press books, offered to tell us about him.

Have you liked anything we have done in the past? If so, tell us about it and we will listen. All you seem to want to do is throw eggs and be critical. And what kind of a name is "West," anyhow? Remember the song about the buzzard and the monkey? Well, straighten up!

RC



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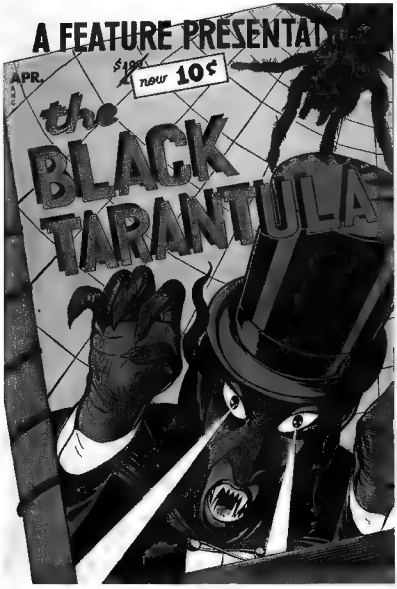
by Pat Calhoun

Fox Triple Feature

In early 1950 Fox shut down several romance titles and began a brief flirtation with the graphic novel in series that continued the numbering of the canceled titles and all shared the word "feature" or "features." The analogy was probably more to a "feature film," but only one of the books on display here was a film adaptation. The other two are an original horror novel and a classic novel translation that turned a 500+-page book into a 25-page comic.

Feature Presentation #5 The Black Tarantula (Apr 1950)—following on the (high?) heels of *Women In Love* #4—starts the novel experiment with what may be the first original full-length comics horror story. Legend has it that most of these "Fox features" were done by staffers getting together over a weekend. This might not be a sure-fire formula for masterpieces, but neither should it suggest that good work can't result. Here, the story is fairly well conceived and constructed. Basically it's a vampire yarn where they turn into spiders instead of bats. Some of the sequences lend themselves particularly well to graphics, which shows a nice understanding of illustrated narrative. The art is not incredibly distinguished, but, like the story, enough care was taken to provide details appropriate to the situation—glowing eyes, demonic faces, transformations caught in mid-change—to make it quite entertaining.

Pursued by a mob of murderous peasants Count Rorret summons "The Shape" to do some demonic dining in this lurid full-page panel, nicely representative of the enthusiastic approach the Fox creators took to producing a graphic novel.



Feature Presentation #5 The Black Tarantula (Apr 1950) Yes, that's Count Rorret (read backwards!) on the cover, who turns into a giant spider when it's time to put the bite on his victims. This unassuming book could well be the first original comics horror novel.

PRESENTLY UP BREECHES FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA A BOUNCING GREAT WHALE WITH A MILKY WHITE HEAD AND HUMP ALL CROWS FEET AND WRINKLES!
IT WAS HE! IT WAS HE!

Moby Dick rises up through the center of a "pod" in a story told to Captain Ahab by a whaler who lost an arm fight ng the white whale. Inset on the right is Ahab's feverish recognition of his adversary.

The packaging on this issue—the "$1[00]" stroked out with "now 10 cents" under it—intimates (falsely) that this is a bargain condensation of a more expensive book, and the "thick spine" and "page edges" on the left and bottom of the cover hint that this is a good deal on a complete novel. Seaboard's *Fast Fiction* had debuted in 1949 as competition to *Classics Illustrated*, and this must have caught Fox's eye as they too used the "spine and page edge" effect on their series (which was successful enough that Gilberton, the publisher of *Classics Illustrated*, bought them out in 1951).

Feature Presentations #6 Moby Dick (Jun 1950) gets off to a good start with a cover by that rising young star, Wally Wood. The insides were more likely done by "the crew." The two Hollywood versions of Herman Melville's sprawling classic date from 1930 and 1956 so it's most likely not a movie tie-in. Maybe Victor Fox picked up a copy of the *Classics Illustrated* adaptation which was reissued twice in 1949.

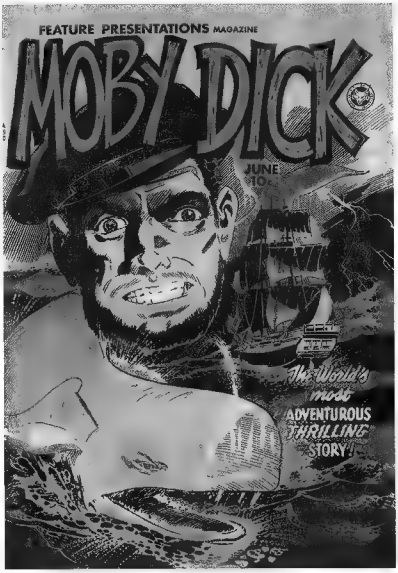
This version is not terrific, but it's not terrible. It's hard not to capture some of the immensity of the epic struggle of hunter and hunted—with the hunter an obsessed one-legged (lost in an earlier skirmish with his nemesis) sea-captain and the hunted that tremendous force of nature, the great white whale.

Tucked into the middle of the book is a four-page short of "Skipper Hoy and that Wreck, the Hesperus!" that's no great shakes but does feature art by Canadian ex-cop Pete Morisi, who would go on in a couple of years to create and produce for Comic Media the superb crime series of "the Chicago wild man," Johnny Dynamite.

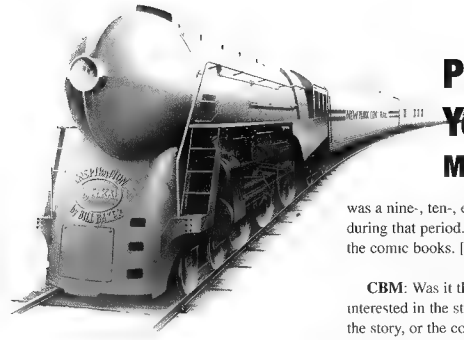
Spectacular Feature #11 Samson and Delilah (Apr 1950) took over from *My Confession*, and clearly meant to capitalize on the 1949 Cecil B DeMille opus of the same title. The Samson and Delilah movie poster "features" Victor Mature and Hedy Lamarr in the same pose as on Fox's (unlicensed!) cover. Fox, as you may recall, had been called to the legal carpet for "bornfym" (to use Albert the Alligator's term) back in 1939 when his first super-hero, Wonderman, got quashed for being a Superman clone. In this case, Hollywood, if they noticed at all, may just have considered it free publicity. The "weekend production party" was no doubt preceded by a viewing of the film on Friday night.

This is, of course, the story of a Biblical "Superman." After his first exhibitions of incredible strength as a boy Samson's mother revealed to him that he had been chosen to lead his people and given the great strength that would only leave him if his hair was cut. After Delilah's betrayal, injury is added to insult when, shorn and weakened, his enemies capture him and put out his eyes with a hot poker so that even if his strength returned he would be handicapped! This tale was begging for

[continued on page 18]



Feature Presentations #6 Moby Dick (Jun 1950) "For the cry of 'thar she blows' tells you that straight ahead lies ten tons of white death—Moby Dick!" This quote hails from the inside front cover, a space all three of these "Fox features" used as a prologue.



Portrait of the Artist as a Young Southern Gentleman

Murphy Anderson on his Influences

interview conducted by Bill Baker

As documented in past editions of this column, Murphy Anderson's graceful penciling and lush brush work has won him an effusive cadre of fans and has had a widespread influence upon several generations of his fellow creators and professionals. However, the question of who inspired and influenced Murphy went unanswered—until now.

Comic Book Marketplace: You've mentioned in the past that a lot of the people who influenced you, including Will [Eisner], came from the Golden Age of comic strips, and some of the earliest comic book releases.

Murphy Anderson: Yeah. Well, they were influences because I loved comic books. I got into comic books because I loved *Buck Rogers*, what little I'd seen of it. And I found it was [reprinted] in *Famous Funnies*. So I had a subscription to *Famous Funnies*, and a little later, to *Tip Top Comics*, which also served as a vehicle for United Features to feed the magazine their old, out-of-date comics. Well, not out of date, but I mean comics that had run a year or two before. Most of the book was filled with the likes of *Tarzan* and *Fritzi Ritz*, which later became *Nancy*, that kind of material in their book. Now *Feature* was another one that had [similar] stuff. *Famous Funnies* had stuff like John Dille, the *Buck Rogers* material. But, anyhow, that's how I first picked up on what you call the comic books. That was when I was a nine-, ten-, eleven-year-old kid, during that period. Just the right age for the comic books. [Laughter]

CBM: Was it the art that got you interested in the strips? Or was it more the story, or the combination of the two?

Anderson: I just liked the story. I love science fiction, and anything that smacks of science fiction, and most superheroes did. I immediately was drawn to, and I followed, *Superman* that was by Jerry Siegel, who was a big fan of science fiction. And he and Julie had known one another since the late twenties/early thirties, well before he sold *Superman*. And they were interested in, and involved in, comic book fandom. That Julie was a great guy for tolerating fans, and encouraging them.

CBM: Right, because that's literally where he came from. The person who is typically cited as a big influence for you is Lou Fine, right?

Anderson: Yes. I would say that, in comic books, he was the biggest influence on me. Although Will was right in there, and I was being influenced by Will when I was influenced by Lou Fine without realizing it, because Will laid out most of the covers that Lou did. Lou would do them in his own style, and in his own way, and not that he didn't change the layouts, but much of his storytelling and the layouts came right from Will. And, of course, he later worked for Will on *The Spirit*, among many other things.

CBM: What is it about Lou's work, his style, that grabbed you?

Anderson: Well, it was just something that really struck a chord with me, and most of the young artists in the business, too, because he had a way of exaggerating figures that no one else did; they were realistic, but they were still

exaggerated. While Jack Kirby exaggerated, he threw reality to the winds. He was a top draftsman, when he wanted to be. He could draw the human figure as well as anyone, but that was his vehicle for expressing himself—you know, the long strides, and big fist coming at you, and that sort of thing, was all basically Jack Kirby's contribution [to comics storytelling].

But Lou exaggerated in a different way. He'd bend the figure, and give these exaggerated fingers on the hand and that sort of thing. And it was only many years later, when I started to dig into Norman Rockwell and study Rockwell's stuff to the point where I'd take a Rockwell painting and render it in pencil, and then try to ink it, and I would ink hands, and shoes, and things like that, when I got through inking the first one that I did I was amazed. It was like someone had turned a light bulb on in my head. I suddenly saw where Lou Fine was getting a lot of his inspiration—right from Norman Rockwell. And he later did a comic strip after he left comic books called *Adam Ames*. Adam Ames was an

artist that lived in Connecticut—you would gather that it was Connecticut [or] New England, anyhow — and he had a maid that was like someone out of *Tom Sawyer*, that looked after his house for him. He was a widower, and he had two children, but he also had a love life. And he was kind of a *Mary Worth* of the time. This was [a strip dealing with] family relationships, and romantic entanglements, and so forth. But the strip, unfortunately, lasted three or four years, and just didn't make it. But it was just beautifully done. But the Adam Ames character looked like Norman Rockwell, and the whole New England setup was like something out of a Norman Rockwell picture. [General laughter]

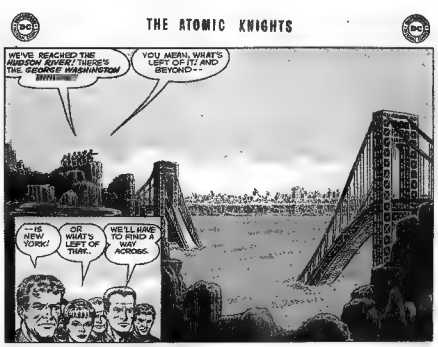
CBM: Would it be fair to say that your fluid line is largely influenced by Lou?

Anderson: Well, him, and Will, of course. And much of my compositions and approach to figure drawing goes to [Alex] Raymond and [Hal] Foster. I like those guys because of their exaggerations. Will, actually, when all's said and done, he has to be, almost anyone that's half way objective and looks at his work, they have to realize that he was the father of the modern day comic book. There's no question about it.

CBM: Right. Well, you've already pointed out a number of the ways he's established the basic language of modern comics through his designs, and storytelling…

Anderson: That's right. Storytelling, use of dramatic blacks — he was the first comic book artist that did that. [Milton] Caniff was getting into that.

I could tell you many side stories about when I was working for Will. He had gone for a conference on the magazine. I didn't go that particular time, and they were giving out the awards at the Cartoonists Society [annual meeting]. And, since I was a member, Will asked me, "Are you going to the Cartoonists Society awards banquet?" I said, "Well, I hadn't really planned on it, Will, but I would like to go sometime." I usually avoided those big things, because they were almost always black tie affairs. They didn't expect you to come in a tux or anything, but it was that kind of thing. It was the peak event for the Cartoonists Society. So he said, "Would you go? I heard that I might be up for an award." So I went. And Will said, "I'll be back, but if the plane's delayed any, or I can't get in, I might not get there in time." But he did show up. He showed up after the affair was well under way, but he was there in time to receive the award. And it was given to him by Milton Caniff, and Caniff told a story in giving the award to Will. He said that back in the late thirties and early forties, he said, "I became aware of it, and I used to have my chauffeur go down to Times Square and buy *The Philadelphia Bulletin* on Saturday nights when they first came in." *The Philadelphia Bulletin* was the first newspaper in the area carrying *The Spirit* [Sunday section] at the time, and he said, "I didn't want to miss any of it." And, coming from Milton Caniff that was the ultimate compliment.


THE ATOMIC KNIGHTS
WE'VE REACHED THE HUDSON RIVER! THERE'S THE GEORGE WASHINGTON BRIDGE!
YOU MEAN, WHAT'S LEFT OF IT! AND BEYOND--
--IS NEW YORK!
OR WHAT'S LEFT OF THEM.
WE'LL HAVE TO FIND A WAY ACROSS.
An "Atomic Knights" panel featuring a blasted New York City.

CBM: Yeah, I guess so! [General laughter]

Anderson: And while I don't think Will was influenced by him particularly, he was influenced by his storytelling, and his effective use of blacks for dramatic effects. He incorporated that kind of thing into his own work. Not in the way other guys just copied Caniff; Will used his own style, and was a great movie buff. He attributes a lot of his stuff [to Orson Welles], but it may be the other way around; Orson Welles may have been inspired by some of the comic book work that Will was turning out to do *Citizen Kane*, and all the effects he had in it. But they were kind of similar to the things Will had in *The Spirit*.

CBM: Right. I'm thinking of those covers he did for *The Spirit*, which not only incorporated those dramatic blacks, but which became effective storytelling devices in their own right as well.

Anderson: *The Spirit* was successful in a newspaper where no other comic book character would have been, in my opinion, because it was geared for an adult reader. And it was never a big success in comic books, paradoxically. At that time comics were really for kids, and they weren't geared for an adult reader. So Will really found the prime medium when he got *The Spirit* going. He had the comic book format, and he had adult material. Still, the average teenager could read it, and really appreciate it, but not an eight- or nine-year-old, or a ten-year-old.

CBM: Is there anyone else who has had any real impact on your work that you haven't mentioned yet?

Anderson: Well, no, I just named the four guys that I generally [cite]. In a

small way, Roy Crane was an influence, like he was on many other artists. Another little aside: I once asked Will who his favorite cartoonist was, and who he would say was the best newspaper cartoonist. He didn't hesitate for a second or he didn't blink an eye. He just said, "Roy Crane." So Roy Crane was an influence on him, and he was an influence on Frank Robbins. I remember seeing Frank when he was working for Julie—he was writing, and he drew a few strips, some Batman stories, for Julie But he came in and he was looking at his watch. He said, "I've got to leave, I've got to meet someone!" And it came out, as I talked to him, Roy Crane was in town and he was meeting him for lunch. [General laughter]

CBM: You don't want to miss that, no.

Anderson: No, he didn't want to. I never met Crane. Not that I ever had much of an opportunity; he lived down in Texas, or Oklahoma, and rarely came to town

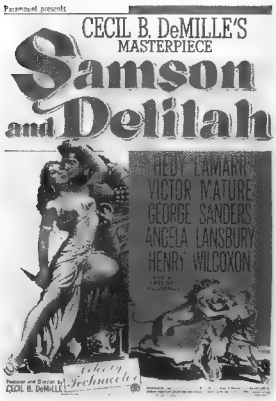
CBM: What about Crane's work did you like?

Anderson He was a great storyteller, a great yarn teller. And the characters that he had were just fantastic.

I was [also] influenced by [E. C.] Segar on *Popeye*. I loved *Popeye*. I used to sit down and try to copy [Segar]. I can still draw a pretty wicked Popeye, a Segar-type of Popeye, I copied him so much. [General laughter] That's one of the features I guess I bugged my mother so much to read to me everyday that, as I've said many times, having been a teacher before she was married, she sat down and taught me to read so she could get me off her back. [More general laughter]

CBM: Ah, another success story directly attributable to learning to read with comics!

Anderson: I don't know, but that certainly spells [out] what led me down the path. [Still more laughter]



Samson and Delilah poster for the 1949 Paramount release. The Heritage auction catalog writer blurbing it said: "Who could forget when the blind and humiliated Samson is led between the two columns that support the temple. The jeers of the crowd fall deathly quiet, as they gaze, bewildered, when the columns begin to move."

Weird Words

[continued from page 15]

the four-color treatment as the super-hero concept was integral to the market success of comic books, and this honors an early precursor. "The crew"—high on Hedy Lamarr—outdid themselves on this one. Worth pointing out is that Fox's relationship with the character actually does predate Cecil B.'s since Samson debuted on the cover of *Fantastic Comics* #1 (Dec 1939) where he remained lead feature through all 23 issues of the title.

Spectacular Feature #11 Samson and Delilah (Apr 1950) This slapdash effort knocked out over a weekend by a group of Fox staffers under the spell of the 1949 film nonetheless emerges as one of the great graphic novels on the "superman" theme.

After a rousing climax several ad pages in the back show that these graphic novels were being pitched to adults: stopping hair loss for men and dresses by mail for women, and for both genders an invitation to join the "Fiction Book Club" and buy cheap reprints of bestsellers like *The Wrath and the Wind* and *Bonanza Queen*.

Spectacular Features #12 gave the graphic treatment to the grim glory of Iwo Jima, and then the "novel" idea was dropped, but it lasted three more issues as a "true" crime comic. And after Moby Dick, *Feature Stories* managed two issues of jungle thrills. Although the Fox feature-length comic books were few in number, they rank among the better efforts of a company not often remembered for producing quality work.

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#66 Women of the Spirit, Batman & Raven!	$8
#72 Iron Man & Subby, Larry Lieber Part I	$8
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LIFE

Commercial Comics Inc.

1507 M Street, N. W.
Washington, D. C.

Dear Reader:

Before Life Magazine publishes any feature its editors carefully study and explore all details for popular public interest. Commercial Comics, Inc. is honored therefore, for Life's acknowledgement of our position as pioneer and leader in the field of political comic book promotion.

Communication through the medium of pictures is as old as history itself. But, as seen in this article, discovery of the amazing potency of picture stories in political campaigns is new. More than ever, the comics technique is assuming an important role, both in primary and general elections. It has been used by Presidents, Senators, Congressmen, Governors and Mayors with satisfying and, in some cases, spectacular results.

We wish to emphasize that Commercial Comics, Inc. is not responsible for devising the character assassination brand of comic book that has been used in a few cases to berate an opponent. Our original and present purpose in using comics to promote political candidates is the same: to take advantage of the appeal of authentic pictures and light dialogue by dramatizing in a positive way the outstanding events of a candidate's career, thus illustrating qualities which show his fitness for the position sought. The approach is dignified. The medium is economical. Best of all, it works.

Very truly yours,

COMMERCIAL COMICS, INC.

Malcolm W. Ater

Malcolm W. Ater

SPEAKING OF PICTURES . . .

. . . the Democrats make U.S. political history—and rewrite it—with comic books

THE ROBERT ALPHONSO TAFT STORY
"IT'S ON THE RECORD!"
OHIO, THE HOME OF J. PHINEAS MONEYBAGS CHAIRMAN OF THE LOCAL TAFT CAMPAIGN COMMITTEE
SURE, BUT HE'S WORTH EVERY PENNY OF IT, BENNY! HE'LL RECOUP ALL HE'S PUT IN AND MORE BESIDES! HE'LL GET US OUR MONEY BACK AS USUAL
RIGHT, SAMMY, THIS IS A CRISIS! AS USUAL, WE ARE GETTING UP A FEW MILLION DOLLARS FOR THE TAFT CAMPAIGN!
I'M CUTTING US MORE AND MORE OF OUR CAKE TO KEEP TAFT IN THE SENATE!
NOW MY PLAN IS TO PUT OUT A MOVING PICTURE OF THE LIFE OF OUR SA-A-INTLY LEADER, ROBERT ALPHONSO TAFT! TO GUIDE YOU SAINT IT IS KNOWN AS FACTUAL! UNION LEAGUE CURSE - GOPP - EXCUSE THAT DIRTY WORD - UNION, BOYS!
'TAFT STORY' STRIKES SOME LOW BLOWS AT OHIO SENATOR, MAKES IT APPEAR THAT ONLY WALL STREET MONEYBAGS
JOHN AND MARY BLAKE AND THE BRANNAN PLAN
JOHN AND MARY LIVE ON A TYPICAL AMERICAN FARM 20 MILES NORTHEAST OF SENATH, IN OHIO'S COUNTY WHICH HAS HAD 20 CONSECUTIVE YEARS OF REAL WAR. ALL THE COUPLE'S FACTS AND OTHER STATEMENTS ARE TRUE
UNDER THE BRANNAN PROGRAM WELL KEEP ON GIVING YOU LOANS IF YOU NEED THEM FOR BASIC CROPS!
THAT'S FINE! THAT'S THE PROGRAM THAT PULLED US OUT OF THE HOOVER DEPRESSION AND HAS KEPT US GOING EVER SINCE!
TOBACCO
WHEAT
CORN
COTTON
A CIGAR-CHOMPING WALL STREETER IS ALSO THE VILLAIN OF THE PIECE IN 'THE BRANNAN PLAN' COMIC PRODUCED BY
Story of HARRY S. TRUMAN
THEY'VE FOUND THE RANGE! HIT THE DIRT!
I DO SOLEMNLY SWEAR THAT I WILL FAITHFULLY EXECUTE THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, AND WILL...PRESERVE, PROTECT AND DEFEND THE CONSTITUTION..."
THE COMIC BOOK BIOGRAPHY OF PRESIDENT TRUMAN FOLLOWS HIS CAREER FAITHFULLY—UP TO A POINT BUT WHEN IT

The Anti-Taft Comic Book Scandal of 1950

by Tom Christopher

Robert Alphonso Taft (1889-1953) was the son of William Howard Taft, the 27th President. Elected to the US Senate in 1938 after serving in the Ohio legislature, he was reelected in 1944 and was known as Mr Republican because of his influence as a policymaker. He was the co-author of the Taft Hartley Act, a continuation of the National Labor Relations Act, which limits the rights of organized labor to strike if the public health is involved, bans closed shops, secondary strikes and featherbedding. He had been a strong contender for Presidential nomination in 1940 and 1948.

In 1950 he was up for reelection, and The United Labor League of Ohio hired cartoonist Elliot Caplin to do an anti-Taft comic book. The simplistic stereotype of J. Phinneas Moneybags and his cohorts plotting to keep Taft in office was offensive to many, and the book was described as libelous and a piece of character assassination.

On 31 August 1950 *The New York Times* noted that several persons had distributed the comic during one

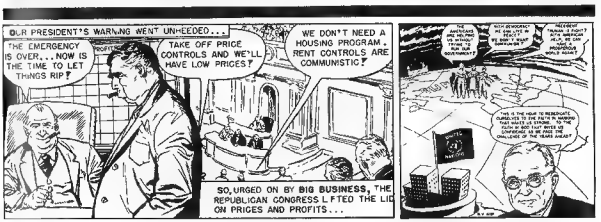
...ral ... TV, sound trucks, matchbooks and skywriting were not enough, ... are assaulting the senses of the electorate this season through ... medium, the comic book. This lowliest art form has been put to ... commercial uses and ...es, but the Democrats were first to ex... such national campaign possibilities. They snapped up the idea from ... publisher named Malcolm Ater—after the Republicans turned him down. Ater's comic book on President Truman soared to a printing of three million copies and started a trend. Besides using comics to paint their own candidates in rosy colors, the Democrats and such allies as the C.I.O. have found them useful for character assassination and for rewriting history to suit themselves, as some of the panels on these pages show. Now Republicans in several states are belatedly preparing to return the fire with comic-book broadsides of their own.

WHERE WE CAN CONFUSE THE ISSUE BY POINTING OUT THAT 90% RIGHT... 10% OF THE TIME!
CAN'T UNDERSTAND WHY MORE FOLKS AIN'T BOOMIN' THESE DAYS LIKE US! BY GEORGE, IT WAS GOOD ENOUGH FOR OUR GRANDFATHERS!
SNIP!
"TAFT'S ONE OF THE FEW LEFT IN CONGRESS SORT OF UNPOPULAR FOR SOME REASON, I GUESS FOLKS DON'T SWALLOW THAT LINE ANYMORE.
SPEAKING OF PROFITS—WHICH WE ALL SO DEARLY LOVE TO DO—WE'D BETTER CUT OUT THE TAFT CHAPTER ON RENT CONTROL!
RIGHT!
J. PHINEAS MONEYBAGS (KEEP OUT)

OPPOSE DEMOCRATIC JOE FERGUSON. IT WAS PRODUCED FOR OHIO LABOR GROUP BY ELL OTT CAPLIN AND BORROWS ITS STYLE FROM HIS BROTHER AL ("LI'L ABNER") CAPP

TO KEEP OUR PROSPERITY THE UNITED STATES MUST HAVE A TOTAL ANNUAL INCOME OF $228 BILLION AND FARMERS MUST HAVE A $28 BILL ON INCOME EACH YEAR!
$28 BILLION
WHILE BACK AT THE FARM WORKERS' CLUB MEETING...
UNDER THE BRANNAN PLAN WE'D SAVE AT LEAST $7.65 A YEAR!
THAT'S ON FOOD ALONE!
THINK WHAT IT'D ADD UP TO FOR PORK AND POTATOES AND CHEESE AND BUTTER!
THE SAVINGS ON FOODS ALONE COULD BE $300 MILLION A YEAR TO HOUSEWIVES!
PRESENT BRANNAN PROGRAM
$58.95
$51.30

THE WOMEN'S BRANCH OF THE DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL COMMITTEE, IT IGNORES THE FACT THAT MANY DEMOCRATS ALSO WANT NO PART OF THE SUBSIDY PLAN


OUR PRESIDENT'S WARNING WENT UNHEEDED...
THE EMERGENCY IS OVER... NOW IS THE TIME TO LET THINGS RIP!
TAKE OFF PRICE CONTROLS AND WE'LL HAVE LOW PRICES!
WE DON'T NEED A HOUSING PROGRAM... RENT CONTROLS ARE COMMUNISTIC!
SO, URGED ON BY BIG BUSINESS, THE REPUBLICAN CONGRESS LIFTED THE LID ON PRICES AND PROFITS...

COMES TO SUCH CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES AS DROPPING WARTIME CONTROLS IN 1945-46, THE BOOK OVERLOOKS THE FACT THAT DEMOCRATS HELPED TAKE THE LID OFF

15

COMIC BOOKS continued

COVER DRAWINGS for productions by Malcolm Ater's Commercial Comics, Inc., and others, show variety of uses to which medium can be put. Quirino book was credited with helping him win Philippine presidency. Political comics have averaged printings of 650,000 copies, industrial books run into millions.

of Taft's speaking engagements. Taft supporters destroyed several copies on the spot, throwing the pieces back to the demonstrators, and Taft mentioned the incident in a speech, declaring that the democrats were resorting to lies and misrepresentations to keep him from reelection.

Taft was reelected in 1950 and in 1952 was the leading Republican contender against Eisenhower for the Republican Presidential nomination

Life magazine ran a feature article about the scandal and the field of "commercial" comics; only the Truman book was done by Malcolm Ater. Ater appearently used the article to describe his company (making a distinction between his product and the Taft book) in a promotional brochure, from which these illustrations are taken.

[SEE CHRISTOPHER'S ARTICLE "MALCOLM ATER AND THE COMMERCIAL COMICS COMPANY" IN CBM 102]

SEPTEMBER 25, 1950 20 CENTS

BUT AT PRECISELY THIS MOMENT, ONE OF THE WEIRDEST "THREE POINT" LANDINGS IN AVIATION HISTORY, IS TAKING PLACE!
HOLD FAST, NOW! WE'RE GOING TO LAND!
WHY, THIMBLE! I CAN SEE MY HOUSE FROM HERE!

The earliest flying mystery man in the funnies?
From **The Adventures of Patsy** by Mel Graff.

The DAWN of Super Man

VICTOR FOX's "FOX FEATURE SYNDICATE" AND MEL GRAFF'S "PATSY" WERE EARLY RISERS

by Will Murray

A non-Kirby **Blue Beetle**.

Reading accounts of the Golden Age of Comics, you'd think that Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster's Superman took the world by storm, sweeping everything before it.

"With Superman," wrote Coulton Waugh in his 1947 book, *The Comics*, "the whole super idea roared into the sky; book after book came out with imitations, a legend of super people grew to such vast extent that it seemed as if American kids were thinking of little else. The entire appearance of the comic books was affected. You had to do wild things in this super battle; get the most lurid colors together, boys; exaggerate that perspective, Mac; make it *scream*!"

It's true that Superman had an impact similar to an atomic blast on the fledgling comic book industry, but the world at large took some time to realize something dramatically new had arrived on earth.

Even his publisher was caught by surprise. Harry Donenfeld is reported to have blurted out, "This is crazy! Nobody's going to believe this!" when first confronted with the cover to *Action Comics* #1, showing the fledgling Man of Steel hoisting a two-ton automobile over his head.

Who can blame him? In those days, heroes were larger than life, not over the top. Early in the 1930s, newspaper syndicate editors told Siegel and Shuster only something "absolutely sensational" would be accepted for syndication in the fiercely competitive comic strip sweepstakes.

"So I thought," Siegel later claimed, "I'm going to come up with something so wild they won't be able to say that."

And he did.

Typical Kirby **Blue Beetles**.

The Blue Beetle
HE WON'T SQUEAL ON THE HEEL
by Charles Nicholas
BEATEN IN AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE BLUE BEETLE, KILLER CONWAY IS PERSUADED BY THE MAN OF MYSTERY TO WRITE A FULL CONFESS ON OF THE D.A.'S KILLING
THIS CONFESSION GIVES ALL THE DETAILS OF D.A. DANNING'S MURDER BUT—
IT DOESN'T STATE WHO PAID YOU TO PUT DANNING OUT OF THE WAY!
DUDE RILEY, PAID YOU—DIDN'T HE, KILLER—DIDN'T HE?
The Blue Beetle
ARRIVAL OF THE BOYS IN BLUE
by Charles Nicholas
I'VE NO TIME TO WASTE WORDS—I DID DUDE RILEY PAY YOU TO SHOOT DANNING
I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT—I SHOT DANNING BECAUSE HE WAS OUT TO GET ME!
YOU'RE LYING, CONWAY—I'VE GOT YOUR CONFESSION—THE LAW WILL DEAL WITH YOU—I'LL GET RILEY IN MY OWN WAY!
MEANWHILE, THE DETAIL SENT TO GUARD JUDY GRANT ARRIVES.

Superman strip

"I am lying in bed counting sheep when all of a sudden it hits me," Siegel told an early interviewer. "I conceive a character like Samson, Hercules and all the strong men I ever heard tell of rolled into one. Only more so."

But when the pair shot the works with the Man of Steel, they met with rejection and baffling statements like, "How do you expect youngsters to like this sort of a character? Superman is too fantastic." The editor who asked him for something absolutely sensational now complained that Superman was "too sensational."

One of those early rejections came in 1934. The magazine was a pulp called *Super-Detective Stories* published by Super Magazines, Inc It seemed a natural. *Super-Detective* even ran an original comic strip, "Betty Blake," starring H. L. V. Parkhurst's girl sleuth. The publisher was none other than Harry Donenfeld but he may not have seen the Superman feature at that time.

In 1938, Donenfeld was so skeptical of Superman that he—or perhaps editor Vin Sullivan kept him off most early *Action* covers—until the obvious became so obvious, even *they* got it.

Superman was selling! They printed only 200,000 copies of *Action* #1, and sold 130,000. With each succeeding issue, sales crept up incrementally.

As the *Saturday Evening Post* reported in 1941, "But with the fourth, *Action Comics* spurted mysteriously ahead of its fellow publications. Donenfeld heard the rumble of distant drums. 'We better have a newsstand survey,' said he. The survey quickened his brightest hopes. Children were clamoring not for *Action Comics*, but for 'that magazine with Superman in it.' Quivering with excitement, Donenfeld ordered Superman splashed all over the covers of succeeding issues. They sold out."

Donenfeld was still slow to capitalize on this new phenomenon. Superman had the cover to *Action* #7, but not again until #10. They splashed his name and cameo on every cover after that, but the Man of Steel continued alternating with other cover features. By the 16th issue, DC sold 625,000 of a print run of 725,000! Superman finally won the biggest challenge of his early career - the permanent cover spot. Even then, you'd think it would have sunk in completely. In 1939, in response to popular demand, they issued a one-shot called *Superman*. It sold out three printings to the tune of 900,000 copies, demanding regular publication. Issue 2 also went back to press becoming the first comic book to top one million copies sold.

It's probably no coincidence that the *Superman* one-shot was released in May of 1939. That January, Superman was first offered as a syndicated strip, realizing Siegel and Shuster's fondest dream even if they got to syndication the roundabout way—through the back door of a lowly comic book. At its peak, the *Superman* strip ran in 285 newspapers and was read by an estimated 25,000,000 readers.

Yet so new was this character that when the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* issued a colored placard announcing the strip, nobody thought it very important to clear the color scheme with DC. A typical early Shuster pose showed a bare-chested Superman (The early "S" insignia was so faint it was often unrecognizable) wearing only red trunks and a green cape, along with brown gladiator sandals.

FOX COMICS
TESTED AND PROVEN
Flash!
"BLUE BEETLE" on the Air! This means millions of new fans for this established adventure feature.
REX DEXTER
PATTY O'DAY
by Charles Nicholas
The Blue Beetle
AN INTERRUPTED SEARCH
SAMSON
GREEN MASK
A Ready Built Audience for YOUR Comic Features Section—2,500,000 Monthly Readers of Fox Comic Magazine follow these characters. Newspaper strips do not duplicate the radio or magazine material.
for Sample Strips and Territorial Rights—Wire or Write
FOX FEATURE SYNDICATE INC.
480 LEXINGTON AVENUE NEW YORK, N Y
Meet the "Blue Beetle" Suite 4P — A N P A Convention Headquarters
DAILY STRIPS—4 COLOR HALF PAGES, TABLOIDS AND READY PRINT SUPPLEMENTS

Adjacent to the **Editor & Publisher** sidebar are examples of the ads Fox ran in that publication.

Fox Sees Adventure Comics in Ascendancy

[From *Editor & Publisher*, 10/28/39]

Comic strips change in style as do many other American newspaper circulation building features and today the trend is toward the adventure type of comic because of its wide appeal to newspaper readers from six to 60.

That's the firm opinion of Vincent S. Fox, president-editor, Fox Feature Syndicate, New York, who has some strong evidence in the form of circulation figures to prove his contention. The column saw some of them this week.

Entered Field Six Months Ago

Without fanfare or any great publicity, Mr. Fox, a newcomer to the syndicate field (he started six months ago), organized a group of adventure comic monthly magazines (*Wonderworld*, *Mystery Men*, *Fantastic*), sensed (it appears) what the public wanted, and bringing to play his knowledge of retail and merchandising methods acquired in years of bank underwriting on Wall Street, built the group's net circulation where it today stands over a million monthly.

This is a neat 400% increase, using as the base the 190,000 figure chalked up by the first issue (May 1939) of *Wonderworld*. Mr. Fox created *Mystery Men* in August and the first issue of *Fantastic* now is on the stands although it is the December issue. Mr. Fox explained that comic monthlies work two months ahead.

Now, believing that his circulation figures are proof of their popularity, Mr. Fox now is offering the more popular of his features to newspapers.

The retro-ensemble made him look like some kind of historical hero along the lines of Samson.

Blue Beetle strip

Nor was Superman universally well received on the funny pages. *The Boston Evening Transcript*, which had been running the strip, abruptly terminated it in January, 1940, replacing the Man of Tomorrow in mid story with *The Blue Beetle*, based on the Victor Fox strip and drawn by Jack Kirby.

The *Transcript*'s explanation to its readers is priceless:

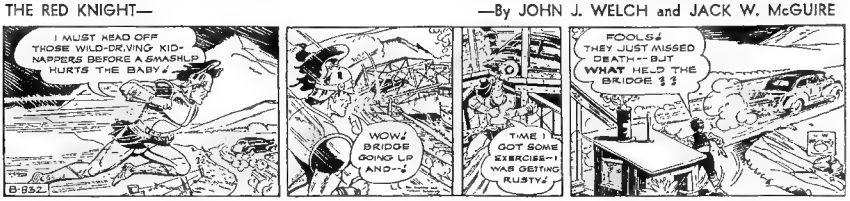
INTRODUCING—"The Blue Beetle" The *Transcript* presents today to its comic strip devotees "The Blue Beetle." It appears for the first time in the place of honor at our right. "The Blue Beetle," let it be known, accords with the latest trend in comic strips in presenting the incredible adventures of an individual of extraordinary powers. But it works, we believe, a definite advance in this category of strip in that it makes these superhuman feats more nearly within the medium of common laws of physics, anatomy, etc. In other words, it makes incredibility more credible, with the ingenuity of a Jules Verne, an H. G. Wells or a Jonathan Swift

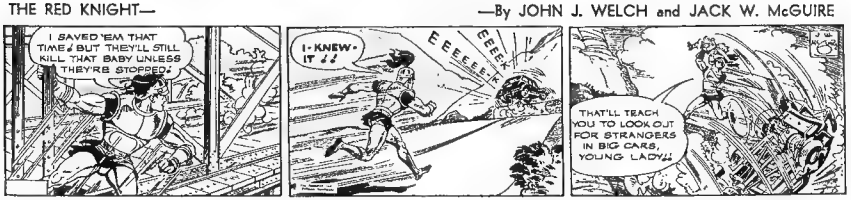
With introducing "The Blue Beetle" with our right hand, we wave a measuredly regretful farewell to "Superman" with our left The escapades of Superman during the months of his incumbency here have often strained our sense of logic, and many of our readers have indicated a similar feeling that the cards were too definitely stacked in favor of "Superman."

Ironically, by March Jack Kirby was

THE RED KNIGHT— By JOHN J. WELCH and JACK W. McGUIRE
IN HIS SECRET LABORATORY, SECLUDED DEEP IN A WOOD DR. VAN LEAR IS COMPLETING AN INCREDIBLE EXPERIMENT—THAT IS DESTINED TO ASTOUND THE WHOLE WORLD!
FINISHED! MY SCIENTIFIC MASTERPIECE! A MAN WHO, THROUGH CHEMICAL PROCESS, WILL BECOME ALL POWERFUL IN BODY AND MIND! HE SHALL BE THE RED KNIGHT!
FROM THE OPERATING TABLE STEPS A MAN OF SUCH PHYSIQUE THAT INSPIRES CAPABILITIES OF CARRYING OUT THE DOCTOR'S BOAST.
GLORY! WHAT—WHAT'S HAPPENED TO ME?
YOU HAVE ABSORBED PLUS POWER!—A CHEMICAL THAT GIVES YOU COMPLETE MENTAL AND PHYSICAL MASTERY OVER OTHERS—THERE IS NO GOOD YOU CAN DO IN THIS TROUBLED WORLD!
EVEN HIS INSTRUCTIONS ONE THE DOCTOR'S MASTERPIECE HAS BUT ONE QUESTION BEFORE SETTING OUT.
AND WILL BE THIS WAY—FOREVER?
AH, YOUR WEAKNESS IS THAT THE PLUS-POWER WEARS OFF—YOU MUST RETURN FREQUENTLY TO BE RECHARGED—BUT GO NOW, RED KNIGHT—CARRY YOUR CRUSADE AGAINST THE FORCES OF EVIL!
IF THE UNSUSPECTING PEOPLE IN THE CITY NEARBY BUT KNEW OF THE DYNAMIC FORCE A BOLT OF DESTRUCTION IS OF MADDENING STRANGENESS ARE BOUND TO HAPPEN IMMEDIATELY!

THE RED KNIGHT— By JOHN J. WELCH and JACK W. McGUIRE
IT WAS SIMPLE FOR THE RED KNIGHT TO OVERCOME HIS MYSTERIOUS ASSAILANTS—BUT CURIOSITY DRIVES HIM ON TO FIND WHY HE WAS BROUGHT TO THIS HOUSE!
B-664
MICROSCOPE—RADIO TRANSMITTER—BUT ANYBODY MIGHT USE THESE—I'LL HAVE TO LOOK FARTHER—
MEANWHILE, THE ONE WHO MANAGED TO ESCAPE REACHES A TOP FLOOR ROOM—AND THERE WAITING, IS THE GIRL LEADER!
DONNA! QUICK! THE RED KNIGHT BROKE LOOSE! HE'LL BE COMING HERE NEXT!
SO! YOU FOOLS HAVE FAILED ME AGAIN!
BUT SUCH STRENGTH! NO TEN MEN COULD HOLD HIM!
STRENGTH! BAH, PERHAPS IT TAKES WEAKNESS TO SUBDUE THE RED KNIGHT!
THERE IS NO TIME FOR TALK—QUICK, TAKE ME DOWN THE BACK WAY TO THE GARAGE—WE RIDE AND I WILL SHOW YOU!


THE RED KNIGHT— —By JOHN J. WELCH and JACK W. McGUIRE
I MUST HEAD OFF THOSE WILD-DRIVING KIDNAPPERS BEFORE A SMASHUP HURTS THE BABY!
B-852
WOW! BRIDGE GOING UP AND—!
TIME I GOT SOME EXERCISE—I WAS GETTING RUSTY!
FOOLS! THEY JUST MISSED DEATH—BUT WHAT HELD THE BRIDGE ??


THE RED KNIGHT— —By JOHN J. WELCH and JACK W. McGUIRE
I SAVED 'EM THAT TIME! BUT THEY'LL STILL KILL THAT BABY UNLESS THEY'RE STOPPED!
I-KNEW-IT!!
EEEEEEK
THAT'LL TEACH YOU TO LOOK OUT FOR STRANGERS IN BIG CARS, YOUNG LADY!!

off the strip and policeman Dan Garret is given the same superpower conferring X2 formula Dr. Franz supplied him months before in *Mystery Men Comics*. Soon, he's lifting steel girders while bullets are bouncing off his chest Superman-style. It was no magic solution. The strip—drawn by Fox mainstay Louis Cazeneuve and possibly others ran its course in November, also stopping in mid-story. (The *Transcript* went out of business the following spring.) *Superman* jumped right over to the *Boston Globe* and ran for years.

Surprisingly, the world of newspaper strips never much cottoned to the Superman-style super-hero. This distinction was so obvious that *The Atlantic Monthly* noted it as early as January 1941.

Referring to the new super-hero comic books, *Atlantic* commentator Lovell Thompson observed, "They run to serious supernatural-scientific episodes. It is true that Superman and Flash Gordon of the newspapers belong to this type, and that they in turn were fathered by that old-fashioned hero of tomorrow, Buck Rogers—passed by before he was caught up to, a has-been before he was an is. However, the super-hero is rare in the newspapers, whereas he is almost half the population of the magazines."

Not that the newspapers didn't sometimes experiment.

Victor Fox also offered a selection of Sunday and daily strips ripped from the pages of his comic books, including *The Flame*, *The Green Mask*, *Rex Dexter of Mars*, *Yako the Great*, *The Golden Knight* and an unbelievable 50 others! Late in 1939, Fox released a four page ready-print Sunday comics supplement to newspapers. The next spring, his Fox Feature Syndicate began offering *Weekly*

Strips, Supplements Available

He told the column FFS has prepared for release Dec. 3 a four-page, eight-comic ready-print Sunday supplement in four colors. The comics include: "The Green Mask," "Patty O'Day," "Dr. Fung," "Yarko the Great," "Rex Dexter of Mars," "The Golden Knight," "Tex Maxon," and "Spark Stevens," all features being polled by FFS for reader popularity. These can be serviced in black-and-white, he added.

In addition, Mr. Fox said, FFS will release this month to newspapers four daily comic strips, *The Green Mask*, *Spark Stevens*, *The Blue Beetle*, and *D-13 Secret Agent*. These are black-and-white. Of FFS's 70 comic features, the column was told, more than 50 are available to newspapers.

The FFS chief, who entered the publishing business in 1936 with a monthly, *World Astrology*, worked in Wall Street for 20 years. Born in Nottingham, England, he came to this country as a child and has always lived in New York. He attended Brown University for one year.

A human dynamo, he supervises all steps in creation, production, marketing, and distribution of the FFS controlled features. He has a unique ability to create strips and sequences. Directly responsible to him are a staff of editors and 40 artists. From childhood, he always wanted to be a publisher. It appears that he has arrived.

Comic Magazine, a 16-page comic book-style insert section headlined by *The Blue Beetle* and *Patty O'Day*. Many of FFS's offerings were simply reprints of his comic book pages, but several dailies, including *The Green Mask*, *Spark Stevens*, and *Rex Dexter*, were original continuities.

Interviewed by *Editor & Publisher* late in 1939, Fox proclaimed that the day of the humor strip was ending. From now on, he predicted, adventure strips would rule the funny pages.

Revisiting the subject at the time his *Weekly Comic Magazine* debuted, Fox added, "I hesitated then to use the more expressive term 'thriller,' as I stood alone in my prediction, but since Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt has now recently endorsed thrillers, I have no hesitancy in reiterating that child acceptance has changed the reading habits of newspaper comic section readers because children demand thrillers."

But Victor Fox was a poor prophet. For his huge line of strips, there were few takers. All of these Fox experiments were gone by 1941.

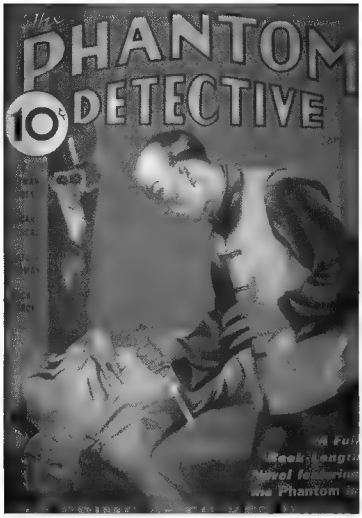
Red Knight Strip

In June 1940, the *Des Moines Register* and Tribune Syndicate offered John Welch and Jack McGuire's *The Red Knight* as an alternative to the Man of Tomorrow. A quasi-super-hero attired in an anachronistic suit of armor, the Red Knight possessed the powers of super strength and invisibility. He was as clunky and uninspiring in his updated Galahad way as Buck Rogers was in his retro-futuristic approach. In his final months, the Red Knight shucked the suit and chemical formula that gave him his powers and operated as U.S. spy Alan Knight behind enemy lines in Japan. But he was one of the rare failures a superman who just couldn't compete with the flood of more dynamic super-heroes who outshone and outperformed him.

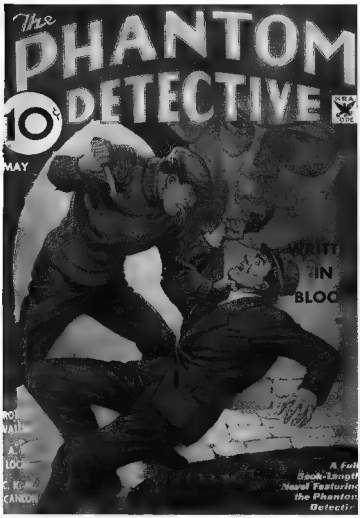
As Coulton Waugh put it, "The top of the comic book volcano had blown off. The books shot up into the air and landed on the news stands by the hundreds. The actual figures are: in 1939-1940, sixty; in 1941, 168. An amazing number of them were imitations of *Superman*, and there were all sorts of other weird people—batmen, hooded men, hooded girls, super twins, wonder women, anything and any body that could shock or thrill."

Newspaper strip readers seemed to prefer the more weird super-hero or heroine. June "Tarpe" Mill's exotic *Miss Fury* ran full a solid decade. She was socialite Marla Drake who turned a "cursed" black leopard skin into a skintight costume-party cat suit one night

Lester Dent, Doc Savage author, in civilian and work garb.



The **Phantom Detective** pulp, in which Mel Graff did illustrations featuring an early masked hero.



in 1941, and ended up fighting crime. Batman also enjoyed a long run. But unmysterious Wonder Woman petered out after a year.

Super Pulps

In the world of pulp publishing, established magazines like *The Shadow* and *Doc Savage* saw their sales plummet in 1940, much of it lost to comic books. Street & Smith's new pulp hero, *The Avenger*, was launched to excellent sales in the summer of 1939, only to see those numbers sink the following year. Lester Dent, whose Doc Savage was one of the unmistakable models for Superman, and whose sales never got much higher than 350,000 per issue, complained: "I didn't have Doc brought from another planet the way Superman was. I just had Doc reared and trained by scientists, that's all. I've never said Doc could jump over the Empire State Building the way Superman can. I just say Doc could build a 65-pound pocket-sized helicopter to get him over the Empire State Building. I never have Doc use or do anything that isn't possible in the laboratory right now."

But there was no stopping the Man of Steel. Radio took him public in February, 1940. There followed the 1941-43 Max Fleischer/Paramount cartoons and a long procession of media tie-ins. In 1942, *Publisher's Weekly* reported *Superman* sales to be 1,250,000 copies a month.

Superman had a huge impact on a field that no one realizes was in competition with him. I refer to the hard-boiled detective hero as exemplified by Dashiell Hammett's Sam Spade.

Pulp mystery writer Frederic Brown first signaled the growing power of this costumed upstart in a letter published in the October 1940 *Author & Journalist*, which began.

"Recently one of the media of fiction, the comic strip, has brought forth a concept that is genuinely new. Its newness is

A spot illustration by Mel Graff from the **Phantom Detective** pulp, no doubt inspiring his latter Phantom Magician in the strip **Adventures of Patsy**

Format Change Won't Help Comics, Fox Says

From *Editor & Publisher*, 5/18/40
by Stephen J. Monchak

No matter how much newspaper editors and publishers change the formats of their comic sections to make them look like comic magazines, unless the features inside them are of the thriller type, which is what children demand, they cannot hope to regain circulation they've lost to the comic monthlies, Victor S. Fox, president, Fox Feature Syndicate, told the column this week.

Mr. Fox, who last year went on record as saying that adventure comics are in the ascendancy in an interview with this column, reaffirmed that statement in commenting on this column's story last week that syndicates currently are studying what may develop into a trend in presentation of newspaper comics—comic books issued as a regular Sunday section of a paper.

Thrillers Demanded

As president of Fox Publications, Inc., parent body of the Fox Comic Group, Mr. Fox is publisher of monthlies, bi-monthlies and quarterlies for which a 5,000,000 total circulation is claimed. In his interview last year Mr. Fox said newspapers would have to recognize sooner or later that the new comic trend is toward adventure strips.

"I hesitated then to use the more expressive term 'thriller,' as I stood alone in my prediction," Mr. Fox stated, "but since Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt has now recently endorsed thrillers, I have no hesitancy in reiterating that child revolutionary in the truest sense of that term: Superman, by his complete invulnerability, upsets the twin icons of adventure fiction: Menace and Suspense. The guy can't lose.

"Pick up the Empire State Building and drop it on Superman's head and it doesn't even muss his hair, but it cracks the Empire State Building. Sit Superman on a ton of nitroglycerine and set it off and it doesn't even affect his super-sensitive eardrums, which can hear a conversation in a closed building across the street. Let a mob of gangsters fire Tommy-guns at him and he can sit there with his mouth open and eat the bullets for lunch.

"What can you do with a guy like that? Obviously nothing.

"The readers of Superman know he can't be hurt, that he's never in danger. Other heroes *don't* lose, although they seem always on the verge of losing. Superman *can't*. He's invulnerable."

Recognizing that comics readers of 1940 were the pulp and slick magazine buyers of tomorrow, Brown wondered: "What change will result from their diet of invulnerability?"

He goes on to supply the answer:

"The pendulum has, with Superman, reached the end of its swing. It's starting back. Heroes are going to be less tough, progressively more ordinary and more vulnerable. Any tough mug who can lick his weight in wildcats is going to be mild stuff to a graduate of the Superman school.

"He can't go on," Brown insisted. "Superman is the ultimate in invulnerability, strength and toughness. He has spoiled all taste for semi-

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"We feel addition of the Fox 4-page, 8-feature color comic section has contributed substantially to the increase of more than 3,000 of the past six weeks, and helped put the Sunday circulation over 90,000."
KANSAS CITY JOURNAL,
(Sgd.) Russell H. Miles

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acceptance has changed the reading habits of newspaper comic section readers because children demand thrillers."

That newspaper editors and publishers have in the past been prejudiced against thriller type of comics, fearing that they would be criticized by parents of their child readers, and it might result in a loss of circulation, is well known.

But this prejudice has proven to be unfounded, Mr. Fox contends. He said his syndicate has been supplying four pages weekly of this type of thriller comics to various newspapers for some time and no criticism of any nature has been reported to them.

On the contrary, he pointed out, one, the *Kansas City Journal*, reports a substantial increase in circulation and credits Fox thriller comics for it.

Sees Others Losing Out

Newspaper editors and publishers who fail to recognize the trend in the field away from "silly comics to thrillers" immediately will, in Mr. Fox's opinion, lose out.

The *Chicago Tribune*'s action (described in last week's syndicate column) is a step in the right direction, he continued, but it is not the entire answer to the problem. The feature is still the thing that counts, he said. And unless the features contained in the book are of the adventure thriller type, there will be no inducement to children to read the new styled comic book.

Anticipating this situation, FFS has already prepared, and has available for immediate, national release to newspapers, a 16-page comic magazine 7 1/2"x10 1/2", in four colors throughout, containing the adventure thriller features that appear in the Fox comic group magazines. First page of the book is the cover page on which is imprinted the name of the newspaper to whom this service is supplied.

4 COLORS ON *ALL* 16 PAGES

Exact format size (7½x10½) of 10 cent comic magazines with the features (original continuity) that built the greatest comic magazine circulation in the world. Folds into your regular Sunday color comic section. A comic book *must* for every newspaper publisher.

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supermen."

Then Brown laid it on the line:

"I quote my agent: 'Editors feel that the tough, Dashiell Hammett type of detective is absolutely dead.'

"It is my opinion that Superman killed him," Brown concluded. "R.I.P.... And this, I believe, will be the ultimate result of the impact of Superman on the heroes of detective and adventure fiction. The ultra strong, ultra clever detective passes into limbo, eclipsed by one stronger than himself."

Two years later, according to pulp writer Robert Turner, that prediction was the law in pulpland. Echoing Brown, Turner wrote in "Real People in Crime" (*Writer's Digest*, August 1942.):

"...the comic mags, with their 'super' men and women, have overworked the professional hero, made him outdo himself. They created the tough guy to end all tough guys."

"Superman wouldn't bother wiping out a barroom nest of underworld rats. That's child's play for him. He does things the very hardest of your G-Men or detective sergeants couldn't possibly do. With his bare hands he tosses around, breaking in half, armored cars with spitting machine guns.

"Any reader who has ever glanced at a comic book will yawn right in the face of a detective who depends on being tough and hardboiled for his sole interest. He'll say "Shucks!" –or worse. Superman does *his* 'detecting' perched on a six-inch ledge of a building, twenty stories up, listening to the villains' conniving, with his 'super' hearing, through a brick wall.

"So, in self-defense, the detective pulps have done a right-about-face. They can't compete with the comics on the

[continued on page 66]

56 That Wonderful Year

by Michelle Nolan

Post-Code Milestones

Some misguided comic book historians would have you believe that the immediate post-Comics Code era of the mid-1950s was a wasteland of censored, low-selling pap. Nothing could be further from the truth, especially in 1956.

Granted, comics in general were greatly sanitized, with horror and crime eliminated and violence and suggestiveness markedly toned down, especially compared with what came a few years earlier and what was to come considerably later. It's true that many comics produced in 1956 seem amazingly quaint to today's young adult readers.

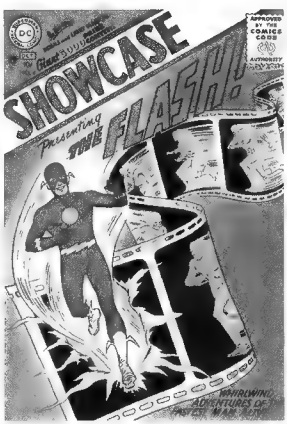
There were, however, several comic book milestones produced in that wonderful year 1956, every bit as creative and compelling as anything done in the history of the industry.

In only one year, the industry produced the following highlights: the debut of the Silver Age Flash (and thus of the entire Silver Age) in *Showcase* #4; the creation of Sheldon Mayer's work of sheer genius, *Sugar & Spike*; the first issue of *Little Archie*, Bob Bolling's wonderful contribution to the finest in comic book humor; one of the most memorable of Carl Barks' stories, "The Second-Richest Duck" in *Uncle Scrooge* #15 with the origin of the unforgettable Flintheart Glomgold; and the debut of Batwoman, another great Silver Age character, in *Detective Comics* #233.

There were several other milestones in 1956, as well, which we'll soon talk about.

It was, of course, sad indeed that the hysteria whipped up by Dr. Frederic Wertham and his screed *Seduction of the Innocent* in 1954 ultimately resulted in the demise of EC Comics. The last traditional EC was the Code-approved, New-Trend *Incredible Science-Fiction* #33 (Feb 1956).

Ironically, most of the parents who were so stirred up by Wertham and other comic book critics in the mid 1950s grew up in the 1920s and '30s and thus many were not exposed to comic books as they developed in the 1940s and '50s. A parent who was 34 years old in 1954, with a 10-year-old comic book reader, was born in 1920 and thus missed out on the Golden Age of Comics, much less the controversial issues that followed in the early 1950s.



Sep/Oct, 1956.

In many ways, 1956 could better be considered the end of the Golden Age than the beginning of the Silver Age (unless, like some collectors, you insist that the 1950-55 period be part of the Atom Age). In fact, comic books in general and all of their major publishers in 1956—Marvel, DC, Dell, Harvey, Charlton and Archie—were still being heavily influenced by titles that began during the Golden Age.

Comic book historian Dan Stevenson's issue-by-issue database shows 2,054 newsstand comic books published with 1956 dates, give or take a couple that may not exist. Marvel, which was a vast collection of sub publishers then known by its Atlas distribution imprint, led the industry for the last time with 431 issues published in 1956, well ahead of DC's 378 and Dell's 376. Marvel's mid-year distribution fiasco implosion in 1957 resulted in its drop to eight issues per month in 1958 and 1959, the result of a distribution arrangement with DC's Independent News.

It was also highly significant that by the end of 1956, six historic Golden Age players had gone out of the comic book business after producing their final comics that year—Quality, Ace, Lev Gleason, Avon, Eastern and EC. Several minor companies, most notably Superior, Stanmore and the short-lived Argo, also last published in 1956.

It's fascinating to recall that at the same time the Silver Age was beginning with *Showcase* #4 (Sep/Oct 1956), the Golden Age was ending with the last issue of *Plastic Man*, #64 (Nov 1956). Quality already had been filling *Plastic Man* with reprints for a couple of years—unlike the way Quality continued with fresh material in *Blackhawk*—but the juxtaposition of Plastic Man and the Silver Age Flash is nevertheless intriguing. Plastic Man was the last non-DC Golden Age super-hero title to make it into 1956 (unless you want to count the Blackhawks as super-heroes).

There is no question that *Showcase* #4, one of the most important comics ever produced, was the highlight of highlights for 1956 with the debut of the Silver Age Flash, along with the first acknowledgement in any DC comic

Feb, 1956.

(other than the cover of *Superman* #100) that there had ever been a "Golden Age." Barry "Flash" Allen is portrayed reading an old issue of *Flash Comics*, thus spurring either interest or nostalgia, depending on the age of the reader.

I was lucky enough to begin buying comics off the newsstands in 1956, when I was eight years old. Not long before I bought *Showcase* #4, I also marveled over the debut of Batwoman in *Detective* #233, which was among the first comics I bought. Talk about your fun stories! Another 1956 issue of *Detective*, #235 (Sep) with the retelling of Batman's origin and an intriguing costume variation on the cover, also ranks among my all-time DC favorites.

In retrospect, though, my favorite 1956 comics are *Uncle Scrooge* #15 — the first Uncle Scrooge I ever bought! — and *Sugar & Spike* #1. For some reason, I missed out on Sheldon Mayer's earliest efforts on the newsstand, possibly because I was too young (!) to appreciate the genius involved in Mayer's superlative tales of the two babies.

On the other hand, I bought *Little Archie* #1 and absolutely adored it, possibly because I also loved *Dennis the Menace* (which had been running for five years by 1956), and possibly because I loved the entire Archie Series from the first time I bought one. I can remember scrambling for extra dimes—the 1956 equivalent of a buck or so today!—so I could buy Archie, DC and Dell titles on the same new comics day.

Here are several other milestones produced in 1956, as I once detailed for a column in *CBM* #27 eight years ago. Wow, where does the time go? Nothing, though, has changed my mind—if anything, with the passage of time, these comics have become that much more collectable!

The *Lone Ranger Movie Story* Dell Giant: This was Clayton Moore's Lone Ranger photo-cover debut. Moore's reedy voice and iron-willed portrayal of the Lone Ranger remain one of the seminal memories for any Baby Boomer. A western classic.

Tales of the Unexpected #1 and *House of Secrets* #1: These were the fifth and sixth, respectively, of DC's "Big Six" anthology titles of mystery, science fiction, and (before the Comics Code) mild horror. These two first issues remain underrated but highly collectable, and scarce to boot.

Batman #100: This was the celebrated DC anniversary issue, following *Superman* #100 in 1955. For some reason, partial images of six historic *Batman* covers are reprinted on #100, an odd decision, because the complete covers of *Superman* #1, 25, 50 and 75 are shown on *Superman* #100, minus cover references to the large page counts, but nevertheless the historic initial view of old DC covers. They provided younger collectors with the first hint of DC's rich heritage.

Jackie Gleason #1: This was a late-comer to the ever-growing ranks of TV comics, but one of the most faithful comics to the original show. *The Honeymooners* today is more appreciated than ever as an example of sheer comedic genius, and still holds up well.

Tales of the Mysterious Traveler #1. There was no Steve Ditko art in this issue, but this was a creative landmark for Charlton, nevertheless. This must have been inspired by the old *Mysterious Traveler* radio show.

Nature Boy #3: With some uneven but interesting work by the young John Buscema, this was the first issue of the only original super-hero to be given his own title in 1956. Nature Boy lasted three issues. The debut issue also featured the last appearance of the Blue Beetle—which Charlton acquired from Fox—until 1964, not counting an IW reprint produced circa 1958.

Yellow Claw #1: This politically incorrect comic book, and the concept, was either 30 years behind or ahead of its time. Joe Maneely's superb cover and art makes this a truly striking title, especially for anyone who first saw it as a child. No other villain was given his own comic in 1956.

Four Color #735, Crusader Rabbit: This uncommon issue is an appropriate keepsake to recall one of the most memorable cartoon series—and musical scores—of the 1950s.

Showcase #1. This was the historic beginning of a new concept—a try-out comic for Silver Age characters. Remember, *Brave and the Bold* was not yet a tryout comic. Ironically, the character featured in *Showcase* #1, Fireman Farrell, never appeared again except in reprints and the gimmick story in *Showcase* #100.

Classics Illustrated #133, "The Time Machine." This adaptation of the timeless tale (pun fully intended!) by H.G. Wells first appeared four years before the movie, but sold like crazy in 1960 when the film came out, since Classics were endlessly reprinted and/or recycled. This one featured effective, adept art by the underrated Lou Cameron.

Donald Duck #46, with "The Secret of Hondorica" by Carl Barks. This featured one of the last full-length Barks stories to appear outside the pages of *Uncle Scrooge*.

Dell Four Color #709, "The Searchers." A highly collectible John Wayne photo-cover from a truly great western film. Many film buffs, in fact, consider this the finest western of all time. This is also among the scarcest comics from that wonderful year 1956.

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A FOX FEATURE COMIC
As David raised Old Glory on high, Samson burst forth from the Flaming Skull of the Dictator!
GREAT NEW FEATURES
"THE BANSHEE"
AND
"The QUEEN of EVIL"

THE WEIRD, WONDER(OUS) WORLD OF

In the beginning....

From 1934 to 1936, the "modern" comicbook was beginning to gain steam and popularity as titles such as *Famous Funnies*, *Tip Top Comics*, *King Comics*, *Popular Comics* and *The Funnies* filled the newsstands. These titles reprinted some of the most popular newspaper comic strips of the day. However, in 1935 a new phenomenon appeared in comicbooks. Due to the lack of available reprint material and the costs for the rights to same, some titles were printing "new," original material. In February 1935 National Periodical/DC produced *New Fun* and in December 1935 released *New Comics*. It was clear that this storytelling medium could be quite lucrative. Publishers barraged the marketplace with dozens of characters and themes ranging from jungle tales to sea adventures to detective ventures to western high jinks. Each tried to carve out its own niche. However, even the "new" material seemed repetitive and interchangeable. Publishers were looking for the next feature that could separate millions of children from their dimes. This nascent industry was to be jumpstarted by a character that was unlike any that had appeared before in comicbooks.

Historical Context

Superman leaped into the comicbook world in *Action Comics* #1 (Jun 1938). Taking the world by storm, the potential lucrative nature of this type of character did not go unnoticed by Victor S. Fox. Fox, at the time, was the accountant for Detective Comics, Inc. and, "taking stock" of the numbers generated by this character, decided that there was money to be made with a "costumed" character. Leaving DC and setting up his own company (in the same building as DC, no less), he requested that the Eisner-Iger Shop create for him a "superman." The result was

***Wonder Comics* #1 (May 1939) Eisner cover for the first Fox comicbook which featured the one and only appearance of Wonderman.**

***Wonder Comics* #2 (Jun 1939) First of a string of magnificent covers that Lou Fine produced for Victor Fox.**

VICTOR FOX'S FANTASTIC MYSTERY MEN

by Jon Berk

***Science Comics* #2 (Mar 1940) Wonderful execution of fantasy art by Lou Fine.**

Wonderman, who appeared in *Wonder Comics* #1 (May 1939). Here was another guy running around in a brightly colored costume with incredible strength and was able to jump over many a tall building with a single bound.

Detective Comics, Inc. was not amused. Problem was that this was 1939, and no one else but Superman had this particular shtick. "Imitation," it is said, "is the highest form of flattery." However, in the cutthroat competition of funny books, imitation, flattering or not, was viewed as a monetary threat. Accordingly, Detective Comics, Inc. moved *quickly*. Cover dated May 1939 means that *Wonder Comics* #1 appeared in March 1939. DC obtained a preliminary injunction (a legal procedure to order a stop to an act in order to prevent "irreparable harm") March 16 followed by a permanent injunction hearing on April 6, which quashed any chance of a second appearance of Wonderman. As produced, *Wonder Comics* #2 contained no Wonderman but Yarko the Great.

The court, in its decision of April 7, 1939, found in comparing Superman and Wonderman that "there has been unfair use by [Fox] of [DC's] copyrighted pictures and unfair paraphrase of [DC's] text accompanying its pictures." In language, not usually bantered among comicbook enthusiasts, the Second Circuit Court of Appeals, in upholding the decision, analyzed the issue as follows:

Each publication portrays a man of miraculous strength and speed called Superman in Action Comics *and Wonderman in the magazine of [Fox]. The attributes and antics of Superman and Wonderman are closely similar. Each at times conceals his strength beneath ordinary clothing but after removing his cloak stands revealed in full panoply in skintight acrobatic costume. The only real difference between them is that Superman wears a blue uniform and Wonderman a red one. Each is termed the champion of the oppressed. Each is shown running toward a full moon off into the night and each is shown crushing a gun in his powerful hands Superman is pictured as stopping a bullet with his person and Wonderman as arresting and throwing back shells Each is depicted as shot at by three men, yet as wholly impervious to the missiles that strike him. Superman is shown as leaping over a twenty-story building, and Wonderman as leaping from building to building. Superman and Wonderman are each endowed with sufficient strength to rip open a steel door. Each is described as being the strongest man in the world and each as battling against "evil and injustice."*

The Titles

Although Wonderman did not again appear, Fox was determined (as many other publishers were) to create the next Superman. The end of 1939 through 1942 saw a host of Superman pretenders. In that competitive field, Fox Publications, for a time, was one of the main players. Fox, an ex-stockbroker, anointed himself as the "King of Comics." He had Eisner and company produce a number of titles for him. Following the Wonderman litigation, without missing a step, Eisner created for Fox *Wonderworld Comics* (Jul 1939) with its lead feature The Flame; *Mystery Men Comics* (Aug 1939 – hitting the stands June 23) with its lead characters The Green Mask, The Blue Beetle and Rex Dexter of Mars; *Fantastic Comics* (Dec 1939) with lead feature Samson; *Science Comics* (Jan 1940) and *Weird Comics* (Apr 1940—originally scheduled for a cover date of Mar 1940).

The Fox production of pre-war books ran from May 1939 to March 1942:

Wonder/Wonderworld Comics #1-33 (May 1939-Jan 1942)
Mystery Men Comics #1-31 (Aug 1939-Feb 1942)
Fantastic Comics #1-23 (Dec 1939-Nov 1941)
Science Comics #1-8 (Feb 1940-Sep 1940)
Blue Beetle Comics #1-11 (Mar 1940-Feb 1942)
Weird Comics #1-20 (Apr 1940-Jan 1942)
The Green Mask #1-9 (Summer 1940-Feb 1942)
The Flame #1-8 (Summer 1940-Feb 1942)
Big 3 #1-8 (Fall 1940-Jan 1942)
Samson #1-6 (Fall 1940-Sep 1941)
Rex Dexter of Mars #1 (Fall 1940)
The Eagle #1-4 (Jul 1941-Jan 1942)
U.S Jones #1-2 (Nov 1941-Jan 1942)
V...Comics #1-2 (Jan 1942-Mar 1942)

***Science Comics* #4 (May 1940) The first cover effort by Joe Simon. Within was the first Fox story drawn by Jack Kirby.**

10 SEPT.
No 2
MYSTERY MEN COMICS
13 COMPLETE FEATURES PACKED WITH ACTION ADVENTURE FUN THRILL
GREEN MASK · CHEN CHANG · BLUE BEETLE

***Mystery Men Comics* #3 (Oct 1939) Only Lou Fine could bring such grace and lyrical style to the drawn page.**

Although many of the features would not endure, it is the covers of these books as rendered from July 1939 to April 1940 that has made these early issues and the company a collecting favorite.

Under the direction of Will Eisner, Lou Fine created in this period some of the most beautifully rendered covers of the Golden Age. Fine was able to bring motion to the drawn page. His lyrical style was "aped" by artists of the day. (Compare Fine's ape on the cover of *Wonder Comics* #2 with Bob Kane's ape in *Detective Comics* #31) Fine was admired by the comicbook buying public and fellow artists. (See Fine sidebar) The covers to *Wonderworld Comics* #7 (with the hallmark Fine "ghoul drool"), *Mystery Men Comics* #3, *Science Comics* #2 and *Fantastic Comics* #3 are some of the key classic covers of the entire Golden Age of comics.

Will Eisner and his Shop Artists

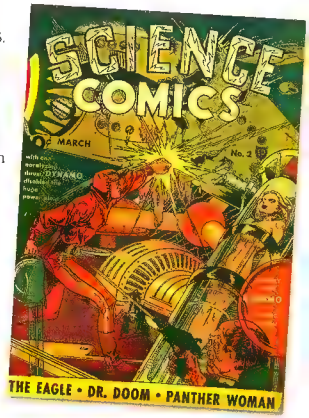
Fine was not the only artist that graced the pages of these early Fox issues. Part of the shop in this early period was comprised of Klaus Nordling (freelance), Mort Meskin, Alex Blum (his daughter, Toni Blum, and eventual husband, Bill Bossert, carried out much of the writing duties) and Bob Kane. Bob Powell drew "D-13" (after the Eisner Shop left, Chuck Cuidera drew the feature for a time) and Dr. Fung. Dick Briefer produced Rex Dexter of Mars—an imaginative rollicking space adventure strip. (Briefer and Eisner had worked on the short-lived title of *Wow What a Magazine* in 1936). Eisner himself drew some early features. Art Peddy contributed western and adventure features and the ubiquitous Fred Schwab drew humor strips for the early issues of *Mystery Men Comics* and other Fox titles Even Jim Mooney, fresh from Los Angeles, worked briefly for Eisner producing several stories of The Moth. (Ironically, as Mooney relates, when interviewed by Whitney Ellsworth in the late 1940s to work on Batman, Mooney used his work on The Moth as proof he could draw Batman—since he had been instructed to use the Batman image as a guide for drawing the Moth. He got the job, which started a long association of Mooney with DC.) Mooney did not enjoy his short stay in the Eisner bullpen because he lacked "freedom." Interestingly, Eisner had put people on salary in his shop so he could exert more "control." (See Eisner sidebar.)

George Tuska contributed Zanzibar starting in *Mystery Men Comics* #1 and Tom Barry in *Wonderworld Comics* #4. This was Tuska's first work in comics. Tuska had no prior experience in comics and had to produce a comic story overnight to convince Iger to hire him. Tuska was part of the Eisner stable and contributed features for Fiction House such as Shark Brodie. His graceful and clean lines complemented his storytelling powers. He drew the cover for *Mystery Men Comics* #6 (Jan 1940) and *Weird Comics* #1 (Apr 1940).

However, as the demand grew on the shop and turnovers persisted, the artists were required to take work home and the deadlines became more demanding. For payment of five dollars a page, it simply was not enough. As Tuska relates, he went out to lunch with the bullpen one day and said he had to "meet someone" and never returned. (Of interest is that the Zanzibar strip retained Tuska's name—as did the Powell and Briefer strips—after he left. All of the strips retained the "original" artist name—whether real name or pen name.) Several weeks later he hooked up with Harry Chesler. He was soon joined there by Charlie Sultan who had quit the Eisner shop shortly after Tuska left for the same reason. (This link of Sultan to the Eisner shop evinces his direct exposure to Lou Fine. Sultan obviously was heavily influenced by Fine. Compare not only the style of his art but the "derivative" concepts of his covers as evidenced by his covers to *Punch Comics* #1 and *Scoop Comics* #2 with Fine's covers to *Fantastic Comics* #5 and *Hit Comics* #5.)

Victor S. Fox-Publisher

Who was Victor S. Fox? Hard to say in that very little is recorded about the man. It appears that Fox, even before his infamous behavior in comics, was a scoundrel. The report that Fox was an "ex-stockbroker" is an understate-



***Mystery Men Comics* #3 (Oct 1939) Only Lou Fine could bring such grace and lyrical style to the drawn page.**

10¢ MARCH
No. 8
MYSTERY MEN COMICS
EVERY ISSUE STARTLING ADVENTURES OF THE BLUE BEETLE
D-13 SECRET AGENT • GREEN MASK • ZANZIBAR

***Mystery Men Comics* #6 (Jan 1940) The first cover produced by George Tuska.**

ment. Fox was indicted on November 27, 1929 for mail fraud and a "boiler room" "sell and switch" stock scheme—a scheme where good stocks were sold for bad and purchases made of "unissued" stocks which were not delivered. With this fine resume, somehow he wound up as an accountant/bookkeeper for Detective Comics, Inc. after which he set up his own comic business.

To the extent that any contemporary commented about Fox, no one had anything nice to say. Fox clearly was interested strictly in making a buck from comics. Copying others' work (hardly novel at the time), paying low rates or not paying at all appears to be his trademarks. Ostentatious, surrounded by a large office, Fox proclaimed to all that would listen that he was The King of Comics. Eisner commented that "Fox was a very, very shifty, fast-footed business man who would create fictitious names because he was always afraid of being sued." Joe Simon recounted, "The man was insane, absolutely insane. He would go off on a speech like, 'I'm the King of the Comics, and I'm not playing school here with chalk on the blackboard. I've got millions of dollars tied up in this business!' The man was *mad*." Simon described Fox as a "short, round, nattily dressed man in his late forties, with a rasping voice that would shrill to frightening crescendos when he was excited. And he was excited often." Kirby described Fox as an "Edward G. Robinson" character. He was the ultimate promoter and huckster. He ran the business with associate Robert Farrell.

The recollection of Al Feldstein, who was just a kid at the time when he worked briefly for Fox in the late 1940s, paints a remarkably similar (negative) picture of the man:

I remember doing art work for The Blue Beetle (1945-46) when I was at the Jerry Iger Studio. When I first started to "freelance," after leaving Jerry Iger's sweatshop (1946-47), one of the several people who gave me work was Bob Farrell.

In fact, Bob also gave me a place to work. .mainly his terraced apartment overlooking Gramercy Park.. because my working at home had become rather difficult for me, what with a new baby in a three-room apartment and a doting mother-in-law living down the hall. Bob Farrell used to drive a convertible Cadillac, which, I thought, was the cat's meow! He was definitely a wheeler-dealer, and he did have some sort of business association with Fox.

It was Bob Farrell who introduced me to Victor Fox—in return for a "commission" on all moneys paid to me by the Fox outfit Farrell was aware that I was re-writing his own scripts and doing a good job on his own art needs.

LEFT: *Mystery Men Comics* #8 (Mar 1940) Lou Fine takes his one and only crack at drawing The Blue Beetle.

***Mystery Men Comics* #30 (Jan 1942) Ramona Patenaude again places a damsel in extreme distress.**

***Wonderworld Comics* #7 (Nov 1939) Ghouls and drool by Lou Fine. It does not get better than this.**

Bob somehow knew that Victor Fox was looking for someone to "package" a teenage book for him, Archie being a hot-seller, and so he arranged the introduction and, in return, the agent fee

Victor was short, round, bald and coarsely gruff, with horn-rimmed glasses and a permanent cigar clamped between his teeth. He was the personification of the typical exploiting comic book publisher of his day—grinding out shameless imitations of successful titles and trends, and treating his artists and editors like dirt.

Actually, I had very little contact with Victor Fox personally after the initial introduction by Bob Farrell. I was consequently hired by Fox Features to package first one, then two, and then a third "teenage" title: Junior, Sunny and Corliss Archer...writing and drawing the first two complete books...and adapting the original radio scripts and doing the art for the third

As far as Victor was concerned, we ran into each other once or twice when I was delivering finished books ..and he grudgingly complimented me on the job I was doing (but not too much, for fear I might ask for more money!).

After a while, I learned from my letterer, Jim Wroten, that Fox was getting himself into financial trouble and that I should make sure that I was fully paid for each book I delivered before I started the next one. Seems Victor was associated (so the rumor had it) with the bent nose guys in a business venture: the San Juan (Puerto Rico) Race Track...and that there were some monetary problems associated with getting it going.

It was Jim, incidentally, who also recommended that I go see the business manager who was the young son of M.C. Gaines. He had just taken over his father's business when the old man was killed in a speedboat crash on Lake Placid where they had a summer home. Jim had heard that they were looking for someone to do a teenage book for them...and he thought it might be a good idea if I put some eggs into another basket

And, of course, my association with Bill Gaines, which started with that teenage book deal, is history.

Trouble in Foxland

However, all was not well in Foxland. Fox had never been happy with Eisner's performance at the Wonderman trial and, consequently, "payment issues" arose as to the work produced thereafter. As stated by Eisner:

I refused to lie on the witness stand for Fox. So I told the truth: that he set out to imitate Superman. His defense disappeared As a result, Fox refused to pay Eisner & Iger about $3,000 he owed us, an absolute fortune at the time

***Blue Beetle Comics* #2 (May 1940) Following the departure of the Eisner Shop, for a short period Joe Simon produced all the covers for Fox.**

Weird Comics #1 (Apr 1940) Long attributed to Lou Fine, this cover shows off the great drawing skills of a young George Tuska.

***Wonderworld Comics* #28 (Aug 1941) Edd Ashe creates a "monstrous" cover.**

Accordingly, Eisner-Iger Ltd. terminated its relationship with Fox. The last Eisner Shop Lou Fine covers were cover dated April 1940. Tracing the lead times involved, the "parting of the ways" would have occurred toward the end of 1939, beginning of 1940. In fact, a review of the ads from this period confirms this timeframe. Obviously, without the services of Eisner's shop, Fox badly needed people to produce his books. In a direct attempted "raid" of the Eisner-Iger personnel, the following appeared in a *New York Times* ad on December 2, 1939:

ARTISTS-ADVENTURE STRIPS

Artists now doing complete features for comic magazines can get permanent assignments on free-lance basis. High prices paid for good work. Cash on delivery. Would especially like to hear from the original artists of the following features: Samson, Rex Dexter, Space Smith, Stardust, Blast Benet (sic), Sub Saunders, Spark Stevens. Phone Plaza 8-0100, Mr. Roberts, for appointment. FOX PUBLICATIONS, INC., 480 Lexington Ave. New York, N.Y.

These were back-up features for the core Fox titles. Fox obviously was not shy about trying to raid Eisner's shop for artists to continue his features. In fact, Fox rented additional space effective December 29, 1939 presumably to handle the greater staff he would need now that Eisner-Iger Shop was gone. According to Joe Simon, who responded to the Fox ad and immediately became the editor and cover artist for Fox following the departure of the Eisner Shop, there was no "Mr. Roberts." Rather this individual would be whoever the editor d'jour was at the time (including Simon himself). Additional ads followed. For instance, the ad of April 7, 1940 read:

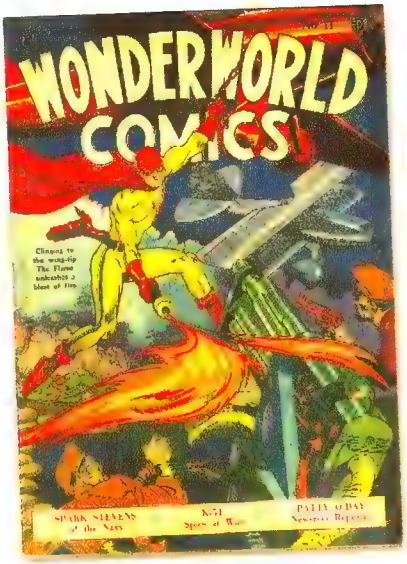
Artists—Adventure Strips

Leading publisher of comic magazines seeks intelligent, enthusiastic artist, thoroughly experienced in Adventure Comic Strips. Excellent opportunity for free lance. TOP-NOTCH artists to get all work they can handle. High prices and cash on delivery Please do not apply unless you are experienced.

Interviews Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, between 4 and 5 P. M. only. Bring recent published work.

FOX FEATURE SYNDICATE, INC.,
480 Lexington Ave.,
New York City, Room 912.

***Mystery Men Comics* #10 (May 1940) Before Simon & Kirby, there was Simon (cover) and Kirby (feature).**



Wonderworld Comics #11 (Mar 1940) Containing the origin of "The Flame," this was the last of the Lou Fine covers for this title.

Open interviews were advertised for Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday between 4-5 p.m. in room 912 at 480 Lexington Avenue. Fox Feature Syndicate, Inc placed the ads. The ad in May read:

We are seeking artists capable of doing LEAD features. Excellent opportunity for free-lance, experienced artists to get all the work they can handle.

It was a continuing challenge for Simon to get the books out on time.

Jacob Kurtzberg and Joe Simon

Fox had a number of artists who had worked through the Eisner Shop that continued to produce work for him. One was a young artist named Jacob Kurtzberg. Kurtzberg had worked briefly in the Eisner Shop freelancing a number of features for early issues of *Jumbo Comics* in 1938 under a variety of pen names—"Diary of Dr. Hayward" by Curt Davis, "Wilton of the West" by Fred Sande and the "Count of Monte Christo" by Jack Curtiss. Kurtzberg was to legally change his name in 1942 to "Jack Kirby." He very much admired the professionalism of Eisner and Iger and that "they knew what they were doing." Kirby was driven to be the best of those engaging in this new industry. He would not accept being "mediocre." He viewed himself as being in "show business." As a "performer," he wanted to provide the best entertainment that he could.

Kirby's first work for Fox appeared in January 1940 on the syndicated (and short-lived) Blue Beetle newspaper strip. With the departure of the Eisner Shop, he had the opportunity to step in and work steadily on some backup stories such as Wing Turner in *Mystery Men* #10 (May 1940) and Cosmic Carson in *Science Comics* #4 (May 1940).

With Fine gone, the May 1940 Fox covers were drawn by newcomer Joe Simon. Simon had been doing freelance work for a number of publishers, but his first covers were for Fox. It was with the May 1940 issues of *Science Comics* and *Mystery Men Comics* for Fox that (although not a collaboration) the future team of Simon and Kirby first converged—Simon cover and Kirby feature. Simon supplied two to three months of covers for the core Fox titles before moving on to other freelance ventures and to the start of his longtime collaboration with Kirby.

Although working as the editor for

***Wonderworld Comics* #32 (Dec 1941) With this issue U.S. Jones, as drawn by Lou Cazeneuve, took over the cover feature honors from the flickering Flame.**

Flame Comics #2 (Fall 1940) Wonderfully rendered portrait cover of The Flame by Edd Ashe.

***Big 3 Comics* #3 (May 1941) The Big Three of the Fox stable gathered for a while in one title. Cover by Edd Ashe.**

Fox, Simon did not stop freelancing. It was with these freelancing assignments that he got Kirby involved. As bluntly stated by Simon, Kirby's skills were "wasted" at Fox. Their collaboration grew as Simon and Kirby produced material for *Blue Bolt Comics*. They created little known, but classic cover masterpieces for issues 8 through 10 of *Champion Comics* (Jun-Aug 1940) for Worth Publishing. Although it took some urging for Kirby to give up his steady salary at Fox (earning him $15 a week in a Depression-mentality marketplace), after several successful freelancing projects with Simon, Simon convinced Kirby to leave Fox and to come with him.

It is from their meeting at Fox that the collaborative powerhouse of Simon and Kirby started; a powerhouse that was to create dozens of characters, genres and books. Their greatest collaboration was the creation of Captain America in late 1940, which was their very next creation following Blue Bolt.

They did several freelance jobs for other novelty titles, such as *Target Comics*, as well as Timely Comics' *Red Raven Comics*. Some of their early work was to help out ex-fellow Fox bullpen colleague, Alfred Harvey, who Simon had first hired to work at Fox. Harvey needed help in taking over some comic titles (*Champ Comics*, *Speed Comics*, *Green Hornet Comics*) and creating the small new title of *Pocket Comics* (featuring The Black Cat) and *Spitfire Comics* (This "small-lived" format quickly ended as more comics were slipped into the "pockets" of shoplifting kids then dimes into the cash register.). The team of Simon and Kirby packaged many of these first Harvey titles from mid-1941 for a year or so.

The Other Guys (and Gal)

One time Fawcett and MLJ artist Edd Ashe produced the covers of the middle issues of the core Fox titles—*Wonderworld Comics*, *Mystery Men Comics*, *Weird Comics* and *Fantastic Comics*. He also drew the earlier issues of the latter Fox titles of *Big 3 Comics*, *Flame Comics* and *Green Mask Comics*.

Although it is the early Fox covers of Fine and Simon that are best known, several semi-classic Golden Age covers were produced at the end of the title runs in late 1941 by Ramona Patenaude. Little is known about her. She did some work for MLJ and for *Target Comics*. It was a female artist that drew the bulk of the bondage covers that graced the Fox titles at the end of their run. See *Mystery Men Comics* #26-31 (Sep

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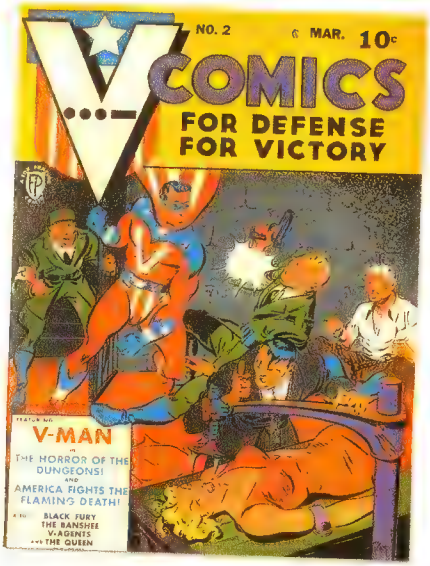


***V ...Comics* #2 (Mar 1942) The pre-war run of Fox Publications comes to an end with this issue. Cover by Ramona Patenaude.**

AQUAMAN

MANY HAVE HEARD THE LEGEND OF AQUAMAN, BUT WHO WILL BELIEVE SO STRANGE A TALE? MOST AMAZING OF ALL THE SECRETS OF THE SEA IS THE STORY OF AQUAMAN, WHO, LIKE A WATER-GOD OF OLD, DWELLS IN THE DIM UNKNOWN DEPTHS OF THE OCEAN, LEAPING FORTH TO DO BATTLE WITH THE EVILS AND INJUSTICES OF THE WORLD WE KNOW.....

STORY: MORT WEISINGER
ART: PAUL NORRIS

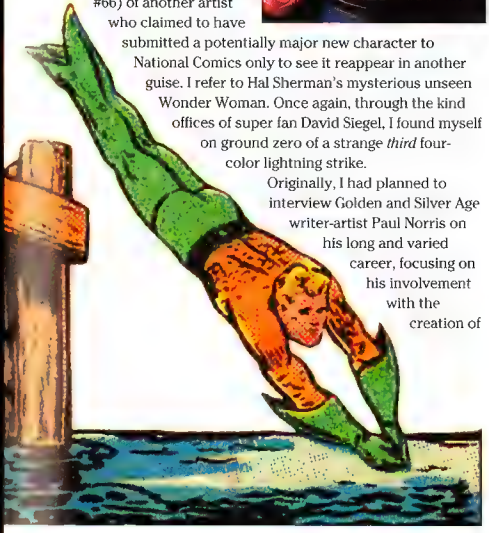
AN UNARMED SHIP SPEEDS OVER THE HIGH SEAS ON ITS ERRAND OF MERCY—AND SUDDENLY FALLS VICTIM TO THE TORPEDO OF A RUTHLESS SUBMARINE-RAIDER!

WE'RE SINKING FA
LOWER THE LIFEBOA
WOMEN AND CHILDRE
FIRST!

AQUAMAN'S CREATOR
PAUL NORRIS

by Will Murray

"Lightning rarely strikes twice," I wrote back in *CBM* #78. I was referring to my discovery, not long after chronicling the strange story of the proto-Batman created by the obscure Frank Foster (See "The Riddle of Batman and Raven," *CBM* #66) of another artist who claimed to have submitted a potentially major new character to National Comics only to see it reappear in another guise. I refer to Hal Sherman's mysterious unseen Wonder Woman. Once again, through the kind offices of super fan David Siegel, I found myself on ground zero of a strange *third* four-color lightning strike.



Originally, I had planned to interview Golden and Silver Age writer-artist Paul Norris on his long and varied career, focusing on his involvement with the creation of Aquaman. It was a story Norris has told before. I thought I would simply go for a more expanded version of the Sea King's genesis. I expected no major surprises or revelations. So I was unprepared for what was to come.

LEFT: Paul Norris with Brick Bradford comic book story. Thanks to photographer David Siegel who took this in 1992, and thanks also to David for having made "first contact" with so many "Golden Age Greats" and bringing them into fandom.

But let's not get ahead of the story.

A protégé of *Terry and the Pirates*' Milt Caniff, Paul Norris first came to the big city to seek opportunity.

"I had come to New York from Ohio," he recalled to me. "I had done work on the Dayton *Daily News*. I did the Sunday feature for them, *Scoop Lenz*, about a newspaper photographer. That was my portfolio. I had a job lined up with Al Carreno, who was drawing Blue Beetle. I was going to assist him. Milton Caniff was a friend of mine and he helped arrange the job with Al Carreno. I came up early in December of 1940. That was a mistake. It was too close to Christmas. My wife and I weren't even married. So I was only there about a week and a half. I

Story panel of the Sandman and Sandy show Paul's mastery of Golden Age super-hero "shorthand," where every line counts and action reigns supreme! (from a 1941-1942 issue of *Adventure*).

AQUAMAN
MANY HAVE HEARD THE LEGEND OF AQUAMAN, BUT WHO WILL BELIEVE SO STRANGE A TALE? MOST AMAZING OF ALL THE SECRETS OF THE SEA IS THE STORY OF AQUAMAN, WHO, LIKE A WATER-GOD OF OLD, DWELLS IN THE DEEP UNKNOWN DEPTHS OF THE OCEAN, LEAPING FORTH TO DO BATTLE WITH THE EVILS AND INJUSTICES OF THE WORLD HE KNOWS.
AN UNKNOWN SHIP SAILING OVER THE HIGH SEAS ON ITS ERRAND OF MERCY—AND SUDDENLY FALLS VICTIM TO THE TORPEDO OF A RUTHLESS SUBMARINE RAIDER!
HERE COMES FAST! LOOKS LIKE—IT'S—IT'S—AND—UNDER FIRE!
STORY: MORT WEISINGER ART: PAUL NORRIS

Original splash page for *More Fun* #73.

went back to Ohio."

"Al was a very interesting person," relates Norris. "He came out of Mexico. His father was a lieutenant for Pancho Villa. As a matter of fact, he was more like his right-hand man, a money man. He sent Al to Chicago to go to law school, but Al instead became a struggling artist. He took it from there. I don't know how he ever resolved it with his father."

Norris' Blue Beetle duties were the usual one for an art assistant.

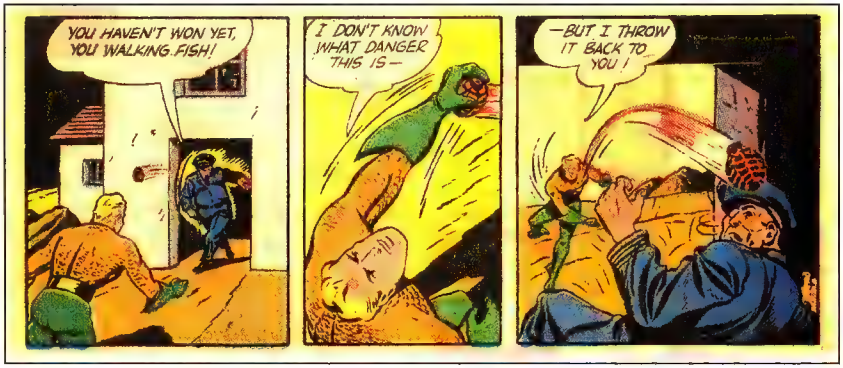
"I did a number of things," he says. "I did some inking. I did some penciling. I did some background penciling. He did the figures all the time, like inking the trucks in the background. It seemed like we had a lot of trucks in the Blue Beetle strip. I don't know why. They played a part in the continuity.

"Al was a terrific artist," Norris adds. "It was amazing what he could do with a brush. He taught me how to use a #3 Windsor-Newton brush. And I used it from then on, as I got some proficiency with it."

That first disappointing brush with the Golden Age of comics was not the end.

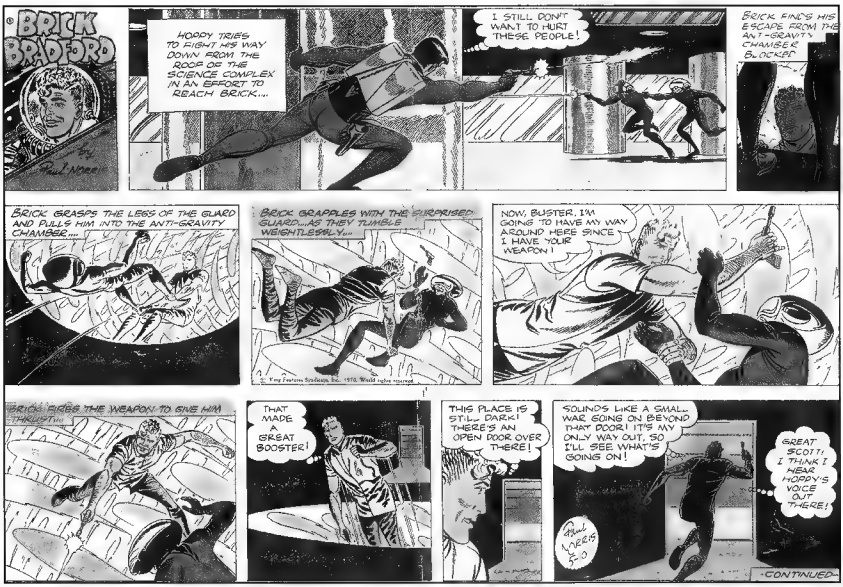
"Then Al got in touch with me and I went back up there in February of 1941," Norris relates. "We tried to work together. Al was a great guy and we were very good friends, but we just couldn't sit down in the same room and seem to work things out in an even manner. I think he was only getting eight dollars a page for Blue Beetle. Finally Al said to me, 'Why don't you try out on your own?' I said, 'That's a good idea.'

"So the following day I took my portfolio down into the city. The first place I went was DC Comics. And the first person I met was Whit Ellsworth. He looked at my portfolio and apparently was impressed by it. He said, 'Well, I can't give you anything to do right now, but I'll keep you in mind.' It wasn't one of those things: don't call us, we'll call you. Because immediately he said, 'I think that I've got a job for you someplace else.' And he picked up the phone and he called Prize Comics Maurice Rosenfeld, who was in charge.



ABOVE AND RIGHT: Aquaman battles Nazis in *More Fun* #73.

THE TONS OF WATER PRESSURE PRESSING FROM ALL SIDES, FATAL TO ANY NORMAL BEING, PREVENT AQUAMAN FROM BURSTING HIS BONDS.
DAVY JONES' LOCKER HAS NOTHING ON THIS PLACE! BUT HOW TO GET OUT?
AQUAMAN'S KEEN EYES SUDDENLY SIGHT A CLUSTER OF RARE SUB-OCEAN PLANTS ON THE FLOOR OF HIS WATERY PRISON!
ONE FIGHTS FIRE WITH FIRE—AND WATER WITH WATER!
AQUAMAN HAS RECOGNIZED THE BULB-LIKE PLANTS AS A SPECIES CONTAINING A BRIGHT, GREENISH FLUID. IN THE SAME MANNER THAT A SQUID EXUDES AN INKY-LIKE LIQUID TO CONFUSE ITS ENEMIES, SO THESE PLANTS SECRETE A COLORED FLUID WHEN MOLESTED.
AN EMERGENCY SIGNAL OF DISTRESS—BUT MY FRIENDS WILL UNDERSTAND!
ATTRACTED BY THE STRANGE GREEN SEMAPHORE THAT DIFFUSES THE WATER, AQUAMAN'S MINIONS OF THE DEEP RACE TO THE AID OF THEIR HUMAN ALLY!
THE MASS OF PORPOISES PROPEL AQUAMAN ABOVE, WHERE THE LESSER PRESSURE....
THANKS, FRIENDS. I KNEW YOU'D GET MY SIGNAL!
... MAKES IT POSSIBLE FOR HIM TO BURST HIS BONDS!
I FEEL LIKE A NEW MAN UP HERE!
AQUAMAN KNIFES THROUGH THE WATER LIKE A FLASHING SILVER SCIMITAR, A HUMAN TORPEDO YEARNING TO DESTROY A BAND OF INHUMAN OUTLAWS!
NOT MUCH OF A WORKOUT—YET!
THAT SEA CREATURE WAS LIKE MANY ANOTHER POWERFUL ENEMY—OUR WITS WERE TOO MUCH FOR HIM!
YES—HE MUST BE FISH BAIT BY NOW!
7


BRICK BRADFORD
by Paul Norris
HOPPY TRIES TO FIGHT HIS WAY DOWN FROM THE ROOF OF THE SCIENCE COMPLEX IN AN EFFORT TO REACH BRICK...
I STILL DON'T WANT TO HURT THESE PEOPLE!
BRICK FINDS HIS ESCAPE FROM THE ANTI-GRAVITY CHAMBER BLOCKED!
BRICK GRASPS THE LEGS OF THE GUARD AND PULLS HIM INTO THE ANTI-GRAVITY CHAMBER...
BRICK GRAPPLES WITH THE SURPRISED GUARD...AS THEY TUMBLE WEIGHTLESSLY...
© King Features Syndicate, Inc. 1970. World rights reserved.
NOW, BUSTER, I'M GOING TO HAVE MY WAY AROUND HERE SINCE I HAVE YOUR WEAPON!
BRICK FIRES THE WEAPON TO GIVE HIM THRUST!!!
THAT MADE A GREAT BOOSTER!
THIS PLACE IS STILL DARK! THERE'S AN OPEN DOOR OVER THERE!
SOUNDS LIKE A SMALL WAR GOING ON BEYOND THAT DOOR! IT'S MY ONLY WAY OUT, SO I'LL SEE WHAT'S GOING ON!
Paul Norris 3-0
GREAT SCOTT! I THINK I HEAR HOPPY'S VOICE OUT THERE!
-CONTINUED-

This *Brick Bradford* Sunday page takes place somewhere in the middle of an "anti-gravity adventure with big-headed bad guys." This dynamic sequence is copyright 1970 by King Features Syndicate.

"Whit said he was going to send me over there. I got over there and when I got to the 5th floor of 1790 Broadway, Maurice was for some reason out of his office. I got back on the elevator and he said, 'You're Norris?' And I said, 'Yes. You're Maurice?' And we went back to his office. Before I left I had $240 worth of work. That's how I got into the comic books.

"The first thing I did was a feature they had called Power Nelson. Apparently the artist who had been doing it was unavailable or something. They gave me a seven-page story to do, and I did it over the weekend. Handwrote the story and everything. I did the pencils and he evidently liked it, and I inked them in. And that was a complete job."

Power Nelson, Futureman, was the early star of *Prize Comics*.

"It was a poor man's Superman, really," Norris notes. "I wrote them myself."

This first assignment started the artist on the road to being a major writer-artist of the era. Despite Norris' seemingly deprecating comments, he enjoyed doing Power Nelson.

"I did," he says, "simply because it was the first character I did in the comic books. It was a start, and I was happy to have something to do, to break into the business."

Evidently Rosenfeld recognized Norris' talents right away.

"In the first meeting we discussed a new series, which was Yank and Doodle. It was my idea. After I got Power Nelson out of the way, I got to work on that. They were two teenage boys. One had a Y on his chest. The other had a D. They wanted to take part in the war effort, so they were fighting saboteurs, or anyone I could come up with. It ran for quite awhile. Unfortunately, or fortunately, I didn't do it too long because I got busy at DC, and I let Yank and Doodle slide a little bit."

A patriotic pair of red-white-and-blue-clad twins, Yank and Doodle started in *Prize* #13. Norris signed the strip with his own name. For Power Nelson, he employed the byline "Roy Paul," a variation of his first and middle names, Paul Leroy.

We tend to think of writer-artists as a modern comics phenomenon, but Norris was one of the early pioneers in that vein. Amazingly, Yank and Doodle eclipsed Power Nelson, who was soon replaced by the Black Owl on *Prize* covers. Later, the fighting twins replaced the Black Owl on all *Prize* covers, forcing the Owl to team up with the patriotic pair in order to regain his cover presence.

It wasn't long before DC Editorial Director Whitney Ellsworth contacted Norris. DC was expanding. The need for new features and supporting talent was great and growing.

AQUAMAN
SWIMMING DEEP IN THE SOUTHERN SEAS NEAR HIS HIDDEN OCEAN LAIR, AQUAMAN SUDDENLY COMES UPON ANOTHER WATER-ADVENTURER ON WHOM DESCENDS DIRE TRAGEDY.... CAUGHT BY A GIANT CLAM, THE NATIVE DIVER IS ATTACKED BY A RAVENOUS OCTOPUS.
SWIFT AS A WATER-ROCKET, AQUAMAN HURLS BACK THE SEA MONSTER.
GET BACK, OCTOPUS— YOU'LL HAVE TO FIGHT FOR THAT DINNER!
GRIMLY THE HUNGRY TENACL FASTEN UPON THE NEW PRE
QUITE A WRESTLER, ARENT YOU? BUT—

Another nice early Aquaman splash panel. Here Norris shows the undersea hero helping a "native diver" who has suffered the double misfortune of being "caught by a giant clam…(and)…attacked by a ravenous octopus." (*More Fun* circa 1942).

MAGNUS
ROBOT
FIGHTER
4000 A.D.
OUT OF THE DARKNESS OF SPACE COMES A NEW PIED PIPER TO ATTACK NORTH AM AND TO ENSLAVE ITS CITIZENS WITH HIS DEMONIC TUNES. ONLY MAGNUS CAN SAVE THE GREAT CONTINENT-WIDE CITY FROM CONQUEST...
THE PIED PIPER of NORTH AM
KILL MAGNUS.. KILL MAGNUS
...BUT THE MAD PIPER HOLDS BEAUTIFUL LEEJA CLANE HIS HELPLESS CAPTIVE!
IT ALL BEGINS IN NORTH AM AS LEEJA AND HER FRIEND SPIKEY, THE YOUNG GOPH INVENTOR, ARE FLYING TO MEET MAGNUS...
LOOK, LEEJA! THOSE PEOPLE...THEY'RE ALL FOLLOWING THAT WEIRD MUSIC!
IT'S SO STRANGE... SO COMPELLING!
COME TO PARADISE
COME TO NEW EDEN!
100446-811 MARVEL '24-688

Splash page from *Magnus Robot Fighter* #24.

"Shortly after I started with the material at Prize, Whit called me and said he had a job for me," explains Norris. "I went in and he said I'd do the Crimson Avenger. I don't remember how many stories I did of that, but I did quite a few of them. I don't even remember what the character looked like, it was so long ago."

One of DC's first costumed heroes—he predated Batman in *Detective Comics*—the Crimson Avenger had just been given a superhero-style costume by artist John Lehti in October, 1940 and moved over to *World's Finest Comics*. An urban crime buster in the style of the Shadow and the Green Hornet, he was about to be eclipsed by a virtual tidal wave of new superheroes.

"The Crimson Avenger was pretty stable at that time, as far as readership," Norris recalls. "I think he probably had a better future than he wound up having. At one point, I think Mort Weisinger was writing it. It was probably Mort or Murray Boltinoff. "

Paul Norris (Aquaman creator), Ramona Fradon (Aqualand creator) and fan David Siegel at 1995 Comic-Con International: San Diego. (Photo by Charlie Roberts).

Coincidently, Weisinger and Norris lived near one another.

"Mort and I both lived in New Jersey. I used to see him on the Boulevard East bus. We rode in together and I saw him but I didn't know who he was. One day he came over and sat down beside me. He'd seen me around the office. We didn't work with each other in the office prior to Aquaman. That was when we started working together, although I suspected he was writing scripts for the Crimson Avenger. And then from there I went to doing Aquaman."

Weisinger had just been hired away from Ned Pines' Thrilling chain of pulp magazines to write and edit comic books. From Norris' description, Weisinger seems to have been freelancing prior to going on staff. Either that or scriptwriting was part of his early editorial duties.

As a busy freelancer, Norris rarely came into direct contact with other comic book artists of the Golden Age.

"I never worked in the DC office because I also worked for Prize Comics. I worked out of my home. I always maintained a studio at home. I didn't know any of the artists at the time I was doing that work. I was never in the office when they were there. I always wanted to meet Chad Grothkopf because I admired his work, but never met him until four years ago."

Nor did he ever work for Fox Comics directly, as some have surmised. "I was never with Fox " he says. "I was with Al Carreno."

For several months, Norris split his freelancing between DC and Prize, juggling Power Nelson, and Yank and Doodle on the one hand and the Crimson Avenger and assorted fillers on the other. He's been associated with doing *Prize*'s Black Owl and *Star-Spangled Comics*' TNT. But he now says he did neither strip.

"No," he admits, "I never drew the Black Owl. I don't recall TNT. I know I did things I forgot. I'd forgotten I did Sandman. After I got to thinking about it, I remembered it pretty well," he chuckles.

Norris recalls enjoying working for both DC and Prize

"Whit was a remarkable guy He was terrific, he really was. I had a great relationship with Reese—Maurice Rosenfeld. We got along great. The nice thing about both of them—Maurice and Whit Ellsworth—they knew I'd come in from Ohio. And the first thing that they did was ask, 'Have you got enough money?' That impressed me. And once you turned in the work, they got a check to you that day. In fact, you could wait and bring it home with you. They were like personalities. I really liked both of them. They gave me a lot of work."

Norris had been working at National Comics under Ellsworth on the Crimson Avenger for several months when Aquaman started. But for Norris, it didn't begin with Aquaman, but with another character, entirely unsuspected by comics historians.

"Well, a couple of weeks before he called me in on Aquaman, Whit asked a number of artists to come up with some ideas for new features," relates Norris. "And I submitted one. They used the title, but they didn't use the feature at all."

"What was the title?" I asked.

"The Vigilante," Norris replied. "But I had the idea of having him in tights. He wasn't a cowboy like they later did. He was a super character, in long underwear. All Whit did was use the

JUNGLE JIM
SCHOG SEIZES JIM'S JEEP. WHEN JIM TRIES TO MAKE FRIENDS BY TALKING FRENCH, THE LEGIONNAIRE BARKS: "SILENCE!"
LATER, A GUARD EXPLAINS, "I COULDN'T TALK WITH THAT SERGEANT AROUND, HE'S A TRAITOR!"
JIM LEARNS WHERE THE CRAGG EXPEDITION WAS AMBUSHED. THE GUARD SHRUGS, "TOO BAD YOU DIDN'T GET THROUGH— THEY NEED HELP. SCHOG WON'T FIGHT THE GUERRILLAS!"
WHEN THE GUARD CHANGES, THE NEW SENTRY IS CARELESS ENOUGH TO SET WITHIN JIM'S REACH. JIM LAUGHS, "COME ON, KOLU, LET'S STEAL OUR JEEP BACK!"

***Jungle Jim* was created by Alex Raymond in 1934 to fill the top of his Flash Gordon Sunday page, and Paul Norris began writing and drawing the character for Standard Comics in 1949.**

title, which anybody had the right to do. That's all."

Stunned, I realized that Norris was describing virtually the same experience that Hal Sherman had. submitting an original superhero concept to DC only to be handed a house character to draw instead. In Sherman's case, it was the Star-Spangled Kid. Soon after, a different Wonder Woman appeared.

Naturally, I checked the date of the first appearance of The Vigilante in *Action Comics* #42. It was November, 1941—the same month that Aquaman debuted in *More Fun Comics* #73. And just weeks before Wonder Woman's mysterious premiere in *All-Star* #8, December, 1941. It all fit. At least, circumstantially. Signed Mort Morton, the Vigilante was the work of Mort Weisinger and artist Mort Meskin.

I asked Norris if he recalled who else might have had similar experiences, but he couldn't. Only that Ellsworth had put out a call for new characters. It stands to reason this same corporate shell game might have hoodwinked other 1941 DC artists. That was the year National launched its Third Wave of Superheroes, which included Starman, Robotman, The Shining Knight, The Tarantula, the Guardian and the Newsboy Legion, Johnny Quick, The Vigilante and Green Arrow. In fact, along with Aquaman, the last two were supposed to be the creation of newly-hired editor Mort Weisinger.

Norris quickly exploded another myth, the belief that Weisinger alone created Aquaman.

"Whitney called me in a couple of weeks later. He said, 'We want to do a story about a guy who lives in the sea.' He had a little rough sketch—a real cartoonish sketch—of a guy with a fin on the top of his head and big fins on his feet. And a cigar in his mouth! It was a doodle that he made. Whit said, 'I want you to create a character.'"

Norris' recollection uncannily describes Timely's The Fin, who had made his debut in *Daring Comics* #7 earlier in the year. Probably this is a coincidence. If DC was attempting to copy anything, it was Timely's best-selling Sub-Mariner. But Norris does not remember even hearing of the character until long after.

"So I went home and I did several copy sheets of how I saw it," Norris continues. "Whit liked them. So he had Mort Weisinger grind out a script. He took it over to me and I started drawing it. Mort wrote the scripts, but Whit was really the editor."

Norris says he can't be certain if Weisinger had been involved before that stage or not.

"To be honest," he says, "I don't know what had happened prior to that day. All I know is that Whit said we want to do this character that lives in the sea and he asked me to create the character."

There is no question, almost 60 years later, that Paul Norris feels he created Aquaman. But the character's name, he thinks, came after his original concept drawing.

"I didn't come up with the name as I remember it. I really don't know where the name came from. I created the character, probably between Whit, Mort Wesinger and Murray Boltinoff—those were the three people involved at the time—Murray not as much as Mort. That's the way it began."

Norris recalls that in conceptualizing Aquaman for the first time on paper, he steered clear of Ellsworth's finny underwater cigar-chomper.

"Well, I didn't think about anything with a fin on his head," he laughs. "The sketch that he made was not usable

in *any* way. It was a gag thing. Whit didn't want that. He wanted a real character. Solid. I tried to make it solid without being abnormal. I just thought of a clean character. Blondish. Probably he didn't look much different from Flash Gordon. At the time I thought, 'Superman has dark hair. Everybody's coming up with new characters, but none of them are blonde.'"

Norris' first priority seems not so much to create an Aquaman, but to avoid any resemblance to existing DC superheroes, which were fast multiplying.

"As for the dress," he adds, "I designed all that. I just put green pants on him, and orange-colored mail I wanted the colors to be complementary. He didn't look like Superman, necessarily He didn't look like Batman. He didn't look like the Crimson Avenger. He was unlike any other character "

Even Aquaman's shirt, which many fans believe is composed of fish scales, is not what it appears to be.

"Actually the shirt I had on him was like a light coat of mail," Norris explains.

A mask was never considered for the King of the Sea.

"No, that was never discussed. I drew him without a mask and they accepted him that way."

With another new superhero to draw, Norris found himself becoming a rising star at DC.

"Whit was really laying features on me," he recalls. "As a matter of fact, when I was doing Aquaman, they changed the character of Sandman. Chad Grothkopf had been doing it. The character had always been in a tuxedo. He wore a gas mask from time to time. And they decided they wanted to make Sandman look like a superhero. They added a little buddy to him, Sandy. Mort Weisinger wrote the script for that, and changed it. As a matter of fact, when I turned in the first Sandman story with Sandman and Sandy, Mort Weisinger, who was the editor, said, 'Well, we have a new Batman and Robin.' I'll never forget it. I did two issues of that. I was followed there by Joe Simon and Jack Kirby. That's when I started with *Vic Jordan*"

The first costumed Sandman story, which appeared in *Adventure Comics* #69 (Dec 1941), has long been a mystery. For years, Overstreet erroneously listed it as the work of

Wraparound *Flash Gordon* comic book cover done (along with the interior art) by Paul for Dell in 1948. This panorama technique should be used more frequently as it allows for an expansive image.

Paul Norris-Sandman from *Adventure* #70 (Dec 1941).

Bob Kane, apparently because the artist was trying to emulate the Bob Kane Batman style. Chad Grothkopf has also laid claim to it. The story's art style can only be identified by an expert, but it should be noted that there were three costumed Sandman episodes prior to Simon and Kirby taking over the strip in *Adventure* #72 and all three look as if the artist or artists borrowed heavily from Kane.

Only four or five episodes of Aquaman had been completed by Norris when the New York daily, *PM*, offered him the job of taking over their syndicated adventure strip, *Vic Jordan*, about an American publicity agent stranded in Nazi-conquered France who joins the French Underground. Norris hadn't planned to abandon the King of the Sea.

"I really thought I would be able to continue drawing Aquaman, or for DC," he says now. "But I found out *PM* wanted me exclusively. There was some language to this effect which Sidney Calfus, who was my lawyer, somehow missed. That's why I had to just stop drawing Aquaman."

Mort Weisinger did not take the news of Norris' departure very well.

"I thought we were really good friends," Norris remembers, "but he never forgave me for leaving Aquaman for *Vic Jordan*. I felt at the time that was the place for me to go. I was looking forward to royalties. Sometimes I think maybe it was a mistake, and I wonder how things would have gone if I'd have stayed with DC and continued with the features. I don't know how far I might have gone had I stayed with DC because Whit started using me a lot. Apparently he liked what I did."

Norris drew *Vic Jordan* for only a year, when *PM* accidentally allowed his option to lapse. It was a stroke of luck for the artist, because the mighty King Features syndicate had taken notice of *Vic Jordan*'s new look. And they liked that they saw.

King attempted to contact Norris through *PM*, but the letters were intercepted. Finally, using an ad agency as a blind, one letter finally got through. King offered Norris a job ghosting *Secret Agent X-9* under Mel Graff. Since his *PM* option had lapsed, the artist snapped it up.

It was not a lucky break for *PM*'s Hannah Baker, who was in charge of the renewal Having taken ill, she was convalescing in Florida, unaware of the oversight.

"After Hannah Baker failed to pick up my option, they fired her," Norris recounts. "She took it to arbitration and I had to help her get her job back. The reason I had to help her was because *PM* owed me royalties. She was the only one who knew how it was set up. So I testified on her behalf, and I told the truth, and got her back on the job. When she got back, she got my back royalties for me! I always thought that was a little strange "

Norris' time with King was measured in scant weeks. It was 1943, and like Elmer Wexler, whom he replaced on *Vic Jordan*, he was drafted into the service. Only through the canniness of his lawyer, who had foresightedly written a war clause into his contract, did Norris have a place to return to after the war.

During the war, Norris drew propaganda comics for the Army. Upon his return in 1946, King offered him *Damon Runyon*. It lasted only two years. But he returned to ghosting *Secret Agent X-9* in 1948.

While with King, Norris reentered the world of comic books, writing and drawing one Perry Mason *Feature Book* for McKay and *Flash Gordon* for Dell. For Prize, he contributed to their crime comics, but has long since forgotten the particulars. Soon, Norris decided to reactivate his old contacts at DC. Ellsworth and Weisinger were still there at 480 Lexington.

"In 1949, I decided I wanted to get more comic book work. I went to DC to see Whit. He gave me right away a script called Captain Compass, about a captain in the Merchant Marine. I did that for a couple years. Then I got syndicated work and I had to drop one or the other."

During this period, Norris also worked on *Strange Adventures* and drew one episode of Johnny Quick.

"When I was doing Captain Compass, I was doing some other things for them, too," Norris adds. "I did a science-fiction story for DC after the war, but for the life of me, I really can't think of what it was. I did one story which Mort had written and was also the editor on it. We had a problem on that. I don't remember what the feature was. When I turned the pencils in to have them lettered, and I got it back, the lettering man—who I don't think they used him after that—had lettered out of the balloon areas, across the artwork. He was a coffee drinker, so he had coffee stains across the page. It was terrible. I took it to Mort and said, 'Look, what goes on here?' I said, 'Well, I'll try to save it.' Well, Mort took it that I was responsible for all those problems. That was the last thing I did with Mort. But that's the only time I ever really had a problem with Mort. The only other problem was when I left Aquaman, he wasn't happy about it When I hear some of the stories that other people said that they had with him, it didn't ring true to me."

A stint writing and drawing *Jungle Jim* for Ned Pines' Standard Comics line through King Features led the syndicate offer Norris the art chores on the former Alex Raymond Sunday feature He worked with *Flash Gordon* scripter Don Moore. This was in 1948.

But *Jungle Jim* was in its death throes. King had been giving the strip free to papers that ran *Flash Gordon*. Now they decided they wanted papers to pay for *Jungle Jim* like any other strip. Papers balked and Jungle Jim Bradley was retired in 1954.

"It was very poor timing," Norris notes, "because it was right at the time Johnny Weissmuller was starting to make Jungle Jim movies. As a matter of fact, they swung a little weight, the movie-makers. They had a little white poodle in one of the movies. The syndicate decided we'd write it into the Sunday page. The movie company didn't like that. We had to drop that real quick. He didn't belong in there."

Norris also found time to write and draw a new series of *JungleJim* comic books for Dell, and a backup strip called Shankar the Shakiri. But his biggest opportunity came again through King Features.

The three greatest science fiction newspaper strips back then were *Buck Rogers, Flash Gordon* and *Brick Bradford* Brick was an aviator/adventurer who moved through time and space in his Time Top with his companions, Professor Horatio Southern and daughter April. The creation of artist Clarence Gray and writer William Ritt, *Brick Bradford* had begun in 1933, a year before *Flash Gordon*'s debut. Norris had previously drawn Brick for Ned Pines in 1948. Now King asked Norris to pitch in on the syndicated strip.

"I started ghosting it," he notes. "I started writing fill-in stories in '51. Of course Ritt was out of the picture by then. Clarence Gray was writing and drawing it and his health was going bad. By '52, his doctor told him he couldn't do the daily and the Sunday. That's when I took over the daily. And of course I wrote that story. In '57, when he passed away, I took over the Sunday page."

By this time, *Flash Gordon* was overtaking *Brick Bradford* in popularity. Perhaps this was one reason why the brick-haired time traveler was sent permanently into the future in 1937 and underwent a curious bleaching process.

"Actually, the character was supposed to be red-haired because Clarence Gray was a red-haired person. That's where the 'Brick' came from. But somewhere along the line the color artist at King Features got him over to blonde. As a matter of fact, the way his hair was drawn—the technique that Clarence Gray used—looks the way red hair would be, particularly around the head. Of course, I would always try to maintain that because I'd remembered Brick as a redhead."

Writing and drawing, Paul Norris guided the fortunes of *Brick Bradford* for some 35 years—an amazing feat of creativity and sheer endurance. But Norris was not satisfied with that kind of workload. He continued contributing to *Secret Agent X 9* until 1959. Frequently, King Features called him in to the office to finish up a week's worth of continuity when Mel Graff came up short. Once, he was dragooned into

TARZAN OF THE APES
TARZAN AND THE TOWER OF SHEBA
TARZAN'S ARRIVAL AT A JUNGLE WATERHOLE SCATTERS THE EATERS OF GRASS—AND ROSS NUMA THE LION OF HIS CHOSEN DINNER...
...WIND FROM NUMA, THE APE-MAN HAS NO WARNING FROM SOUND OR SCENT, AS HE STOOPS TO DRINK...
...BUT A SIXTH SENSE OF DANGER MAKES HIM TWIST ASIDE, EVEN AS NUMA LEAPS!
KAOUR-R-R!
AHH!

ghosting *Flash Gordon* for a week. But he hastens to say, he was never on staff at King as many reference books insist.

"That was a misconception," he states.

Juggling two King Features strips kept Norris too busy for much comic book freelancing during the late 1950s.

In 1968, Norris moved to California. Once again, blind luck or good timing landed him in clover. He immediately found work at Gold Key doing *Magnus, Robot Fighter*.

"That's the first thing I did for the Western Comics office," Norris relates. "Chase Craig was the editor. I moved out here and I contacted Chase. That was right at the time that Russ Manning was making his move. He was going to do the Sunday page of *Tarzan*. Chase said, 'Well, would you take over *Magnus*?' I'd never *seen Magnus*. The first one I did, I did completely. But after that Mike Royer was inking them. I was just penciling."

Following Russ Manning on the strip he co-created was a tough act, but it didn't daunt Norris.

"I think Chase said to do it my way. But I tried to keep the characters fairly close to Manning. Manning had a tendency to draw a figure a little longer than my style of drawing. I didn't ink the same way as Manning did. I admired his work. He did a lot of work for Western, and I'm sorry he had such a short life."

More Gold Key work followed. Norris was again teamed up with Royer to succeed Manning on *Tarzan*. It was a plum assignment. Norris had been a fan of Tarzan since his youth.

"I went from *Magnus* to *Tarzan*. I was the only one available, I guess," Norris speculates. "And Chase wanted me to do that. Mike left to go with Jack Kirby. And that's when I started inking them. So that worked out pretty well. Then after they lost the contract with the Burroughs people, Chase Craig still wanted to a jungle thing. And we came up with *The Jungle Twins*. Chase and I worked that out together. We did 13 issues of *The Jungle Twins*. I also did *Woodsy Owl* and the *New Adventures of Huck Finn*. It was a lot of fun."

Despite his writer-artist credentials, Norris didn't script any of his comic books at this time.

"I never wrote for Gold Key. Writing the daily and Sunday of *Brick Bradford* was enough. The Tarzan books were all written by the same guy. He was a minister down in Florida, Gaylord DuBois."

This, Norris recalls with pride, was the high-water mark of his dual comics career.

"Oh, it was great. Here I was drawing a syndicated strip and got to draw the Tarzan book. That to me was the highlight of my life."

But nothing lasts forever. Eventually, *Brick Bradford*, like most of the surviving classic adventure strips, ran out of gas. The end came in May of 1987.

"Brick was 53 years old," Norris recalls. "The syndicate decided that that was the end of the line. Bill Yates was the comics editor at King. He called me one morning and said, 'Paul, I got some bad news. Hearst Corporation has decided to end *Brick Bradford*.' I said, 'Good, I'll retire.' He said, 'What?' I could do anything. I retired the day before my 73rd birthday. Two years later I was sorry I retired. I've often thought afterward I'd never got a chance to ask him if he had something else in mind for me."

The long storyline closed with Brick marrying Saturn Sadie.

Thirty-five years on the same strip should have been more than enough for any creator. Not Paul Norris. He missed the regimented lifestyle of the committed syndicate artist, one to whom every day is a deadline. Golf just didn't compare. "I like to draw and I like to write," he explains. "I'm lucky in that regard. And I was lucky in that *Brick Bradford*, to a cartoonist—at least to me—was a natural. It just flowed. It just went easily.

TONO and KONO
THE JUNGLE TWINS
TEMBO the AVENGER
A STEALTHY KILLER BREAKS THE PEACE OF A SLEEPY JUNGLE AFTERNOON. AND BETWEEN THE JUNGLE TWINS A BREATH-SOFT WHISPER PASSES...
POACHER—HUNTING TEMBO!
WE MUST STOP HIM!
SCRIPT: GAYLORD DU BOIS
ART: PAUL NORRIS

When Western lost their contract with the Burroughs estate to publish Tarzan, editor Chase Craig teamed with Paul Norris to produce The Jungle Twins, seen here in the splash panel to #16 (Sep 1975) eating bananas with their friend Garok, the white gorilla.

There were never any big problems as far as producing it. I'd never got writer's block. It just seemed to move from one sequence to another. I just figured it was a 35 year old story broken up in chapters. This was pretty much the way I treated it."

Although the bulk of his career revolved around newspaper strips, Norris retains a soft spot in his heart for the "less prestigious" world of comic books. His last comic book work was on the Hanna-Barbara characters Dynomutt and Laff-A-Lympics, which he drew for Marvel in 1977-78.

"I enjoyed doing comic books," says Norris. "One thing I liked about doing comic books, it was a complete story. You did it, and that was it. And a person could sit down and read the whole story, whereas with syndicated material, it just ran and ran and ran. I'm glad it did. Really, I liked both books and strips, when you get down to it."

One of his biggest regrets, he says today, was accepting the exclusive *PM* contract that caused him to drop his work for DC and Prize. He even confesses a regret at leaving the half-forgotten Yank and Doodle.

"I understand that when I was in the Army, they really extended the storyline and developed a real enemy, pretty much like they had in Batman, with some of the enemies they had. I think they did very well with it. I really lost touch with those features.

As for the apparent misappropriation of his character idea, the Vigilante, Norris today takes a moderate view.

"Well, that was the way things were. I was upset. It was only two weeks later that I got Aquaman. I always thought it was because of the Vigilante that Whit Ellsworth picked me out of the crowd to talk about a superhero that lives in the sea. I think I was paid for Vigilante because I was paid more to do Aquaman than the regular going price for a page at that time." Norris laughs. "It was all of three dollars more! That was $13.00 a page. You tried to turn out ten pages a week. You *could*. It wasn't always possible. I always thought it worked out well."

As for his Vigilante, Norris' memories are understandably fuzzy.

"I know he was in tights. It was a red and white uniform. I remember red seemed to be dominant. I don't think he wore a mask. Actually, I liked the Vigilante that DC did. It was more of a Western idea."

And as far as Aquaman goes, the artist has perhaps the softest spot in his heart for the watery superhero he fleshed out back in 1941, who survived the decline of Golden Age superheroes after World War II, and who has so far refused to perish.

Last year, he and DC Comics came to a legal agreement whereby he was compensated for his contributions to the character's creation. From now on, every Aquaman story DC publishes or reprints will carry the acknowledgement "Created by Paul Norris."

"It was found money," he remarks. "But really the money wasn't important. It was the recognition. I just wanted DC so badly to give their good wishes that I created the thing. I always felt that way. So that made me feel good. I thank Sonny Bono for coming up with the law."

Norris' one regret was that Mort Wesinger was not given equal co-creator credit, but as a staff writer, he was not eligible.

"Personally, I'm very pleased that Aquaman lasted so long," concludes Norris. "I never thought at the time when I first drew it—Well, I just never gave it a thought, what the future might be. They used that character up until recently, when they changed it. It never got the stature of Batman or Superman, but he's still loved. I'm amazed."

LOU FINE

Although not the most prolific of the Golden Age artists, Lou Fine has left his indelible imprint as one of the finest draftsman of his time. In a real sense, Fine was an "artist's artist." Superior drawing skills coupled with an uncanny sense of composition, Fine's work continues to be admired and collected by Golden Age enthusiasts. He had the unique ability to bring motion to the drawn page. There is something intoxicating about the elegant and lyrical covers created by Lou Fine. In addition to his technical drawing prowess, the rich and unique colors chosen by Fine for his covers contribute an additional dimension that enhances his drawings.

Fine drew a number of early features for *Jumbo Comics* as part of the Eisner-Iger shop in 1938. Fine continued his association with this shop as it produced comics for Fox and Quality Publications. For these companies he drew many of the early adventures of The Flame in *Wonderworld Comics*, Dollman in *Feature Comics*, The Black Condor in *Crack Comics* and The Ray for *Smash Comics*. Much of his magnificent artwork for these features remains "hidden" due to the rarity of these books. However, it is his covers for Fox, Fiction House and Quality Comics that have secured Fine's stature as one of the preeminent craftsman of his time. His first covers were *Wonder Comics* #2 and *Jumbo Comics* #8 (Jun 1939). Although a slow and methodical worker, Fine produced classic cover after classic cover whether for Fox (for example, *Fantastic Comics* #3), Fiction House (for example, *Planet Comics* #1) or for Quality Publications (for example, *Hit Comics* #5).

His work for Fox Publications abruptly ends with books cover dated April 1940, as a result of the dispute between Fox and Eisner/Iger. Accordingly, *Weird Comics* #2 (probably a Joe Simon cover), *Green Mask* #1 (Summer 1940) and *Samson* #1 (Fall 1940), which are ascribed to Fine have to be re-credited (probably to Edd Ashe). Additionally, George Tuska drew *Weird Comics* #1, not Fine. There is a two-month hiatus for Fine-drawn covers as the Tudor City group started producing work for Everett Arnold and Quality Comics.

While many collectors have learned to admire his work, the most telling commentary about Fine comes from the comments of his contemporary storytellers:

Will Eisner-

"I had respect for his towering kind of draftsmanship. He was the epitome of the honest draftsman. No fakery, no razzle dazzle—very direct, very honest in his approach."

Joe Simon-

"My favorite artist was Lou Fine.

He was also Jack Kirby's favorite artist. I know that Jack was a fan of and greatly influenced by Fine's work."

Gil Kane-

"A great event in my life was the purchase of a Fox-published book called *Wonderworld Comics* #3. It was the first time I ever saw the artwork of Louie Fine, who did the cover for that issue. It absolutely changed my life.... I went crazy over Lou's stuff. Lou Fine was one of the few I feel comfortable saying was a major influence for me. What most don't realize is that all the rest of the comic publishing community were literally slaves waiting for each new issue of anything Fine would do...as an instructional course in "how to do" comics."

Murphy Anderson-

In homage to Fine, Anderson has created a number of stunning cover re-creations of classic Fine covers. "Lou Fine was a big inspiration to me. He brought a touch of class to the field. Lou was a tremendous artist who was very dedicated. Lou was one of the first artists to really take the time to do a good job."

Fox Comics
continued from page 43

1941-Feb 1942) and *Blue Beetle Comics* #10-12. (Issue 12 actually appeared on the first *Blue Beetle* cover published by Holyoke Publishing Co.) The cover, obviously, had been drawn by Patenaude before the demise of Fox Publications on March 6, 1942 (note the "white space" on the cover where the Fox Publications logo was obviously removed). She finished up the run of *Weird Comics* #18-20 and *Eagle Comics* #3-4. Patenaude shut the lights off at Fox by doing both issues of *V...Comics*, issue 2 being the last issue produced by the company (cover dated March 1942). Patenaude was not the only female artist and writer to work for Fox. Sandra Swift who created the Sorceress of Zoom for *Weird Comics* was one of the first female writer/artists in the comicbook field. With the resurrection of Fox titles during the crime/romance era, she played a significant role in the romance titles for Fox.

The covers for the remaining run of the other titles were the collaborative product of Pierce Rice and Louis Cazeneuve (*Wonderworld Comics* #28-31 and *U.S. Jones*). Cazeneuve drew the final issues of *Green Mask Comics* and *Flame Comics*. These three artists drew many of the features as these titles ended.

The Characters

Dr. Doom, Electro, Thor-God of Thunder.... No, this is not an article on Marvel Comics. These characters appeared in *Science Comics* and its sister title *Weird Comics*. Although today they certainly are not household names, these characters were part of dozens churned out in Fox anthology books of the day to fill out sixty-four pages. These books were typical of the time period with features running from super-heroes to space adventures to jungle adventures and adventures under the ocean. Many of the features were derivative of the type of hero strips that were currently in vogue.

Some of the "well known" Fox heroes of that time were:

Electro, "dynamic man of electricity" only lasted one issue before changing his name to Dynamo. Jim Andrews was a brilliant research scientist who, while conducting an electrical experiment, becomes caught between two giant electrodes. He finds that he can control electricity and thus create force fields to protect himself from bullets and fly through the air. He dons a mis-fitting helmet and vows to "defend humanity against the cruel ravages of criminals and war makers." His adventures were actually pretty wild, often involving the consequences of his advanced scientific experiments. When drained of his powers he recharged himself by going to the nearest electrical outlet or railroad track. Perhaps the most lasting quality of this character is the three wonderful *Science Comics* covers that Fine drew. In Fine's covers, one could hear the "crackle" of this hero at work.

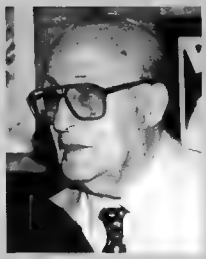
The Eagle was Bill Powers, a young scientist who discovered an anti-gravitational fluid which, when placed on his specially-designed wings, enabled him to fly like a bird. The Eagle took on garden-variety crooks with names like Bulvo, The Purple Gang and The Black Circle. The best thing about his strip was the introductory captions: "Down from the skies like an avenging shadow swoops the Eagle, relentless scourge of the underworld rackets." In *Science Comics* #7 (Aug 1940) he gives up his wings and uses a special formula on a cape and starts to use a mask. The Eagle continued to fly in *Weird Comics* and his own title until the demise of Fox in 1942.

Cosmic Carson was the first of the "alliteratively" named adventurers of Fox. Carson, "ace pilot of the interplanetary patrol," grappled with all sorts of nasty space villains like Brigo and the Fangmen of Jupiter and The Skullmen. Carson's exploits involved saving a Venusian princess from cannibals on Eros, Earth slaves from the Plutonian "protoplasmic degenerator," and a scientist and his daughter from being injected with a serum that would have converted them into insects. Although he had the usual weapons of a space adventurer available to him, Carson would more often resort to his fists and one-liners to subdue the slime buckets of the galaxy. His adventure in issue 4 (May 1940) is notable in that it was drawn by Jack Kirby. Other alliterative Fox heroes were Perisphere Payne, Flick Falcon, Blast Bennett, Sub Sanders...well you get the idea.

Dr. Doom was a fiendish fellow who was always plotting some diabolical scheme. His evil experiments always involved aviators Jan and Wanda who had the misfortune of bumping into the doctor on Earth or Jupiter (where everyone seemed to scoot off to) at the wrong time. The dear doctor would shrink these two to the size of microbes or transport them to a different dimension. In fact, in this latter story (*Science Comics* #8, Sep 1940), Jan and Wanda are now newspaper reporters—not aviators—who work for the *Daily Star* with a news editor named Mr. Lane. (Fox must have had a death wish.) In fact, Detective Comics, Inc. sued Fox again for copyright infringement based on the failure of Fox to heed their letter of July 2, 1940 as to The Lynx and Blackie the Mystery Boy being a copy of Batman and Robin. The court in awarding damages of $2,000 noted that Fox Publications "does not seem to have profited by its experience in the case of [Wonderman]." Of course, by the time this award was made on August 14, 1942, Fox Publications had been in bankruptcy for five months.

Introduced in *Weird Comics* #4 (Aug 1940), Dart and Ace Barlow continued through the end of this title run. Taking over the cover until issue 13, the Dart gave way to The Eagle. The Dart is Casius Martius, the "terror of Roman racketeers," who is captured and placed into a sleep to last 2200 years by a sorcerer. Awaking in 1940 in full Roman gear, he is just in time to see a young boy's parents gunned down. Taking the

WILL EISNER



The initial production of comicbook material for Victor Fox is inextricably tied to the Eisner-Iger Shop. The driving creative and production force of that shop was Will Eisner. Perhaps no other single individual in the industry has had the vision of comicbooks as a business and a medium for the telling of a tale as Eisner.

Eisner was born in 1917. His parents had emigrated from Austria. It is perhaps his father, who painted scenery and backdrops for the Jewish Art Theater in New York City, who spawned Eisner's early interest in drawing. His drawing skills were influenced not only by illustrators of the day but also by the storytelling medium of pulps and films. He worked for printers as a youth and sold newspapers as well (earning $3.50 a week in 1934).

Graduating from DeWitt Clinton High School, he found the depression economy of New York City a tough environment. He had just lost his job at the *New York American* newspaper when he found out about a company that was seeking artists to draw comics. John Henle, who was a shirt manufacturer with "literary aspirations," owned the company. Jerry Iger was doing the interviewing. Eisner was hired along with other comicbook neophytes such as Bob Kane, Dick Briefer, Louis Ferstadt, George Brenner and Bernard Bailey. Together they produced four issues of *Wow, What a Magazine* in 1936. This included his first adventure hero of Scott Dalton. A shirt factory was not conducive to the production of comicbooks and the venture soon failed.

For a short time, he freelanced and drew stories for Comic Magazines' *Detective Picture Stories* and *Western Picture Stories*. Undaunted and spurred on by his first taste of comicbook production (not to mention he needed the income) he contacted Iger with the idea of producing a finished comicbook product for publishers. He noted that there were only so many reprint strips available for reproduction that dominated the early issues of funny books at this time. Further he specifically recognized the need for the production of original adventure material. With pulps on the wane and the publishers seeking a new outlet, he viewed these pulp publishers as customers for "funny books."

Capitalized by Eisner's fifteen dollars, (which could cover three months of rent), Iger agreed to the formation of this business with Iger being the sales force. The Eisner-Iger Shop quickly obtained a group of clients. The first customer of the young boy under his wing, they pledge to use his sword and ancient powers to destroy the present day rackets. Outfitted with a bright yellow uniform with a red arrow, The Dart would get around by, well, "darting."

The "Big 3" plus 1

The "Big 3" of the Fox stable was The Flame, The Blue Beetle and Samson. They appeared together in a title called *Big 3* (except for the final issue where Samson was replaced by V...Man).

The Flame

The Flame replaced Wonderman as the lead character of the line with *Wonderworld Comics* #3 (Jul 1939). As revealed in *Wonderworld Comics* #11 (Mar 1940, Fine's last issue), the Flame is the baby son of Arnold Charteris, an American missionary in China. A flood washes Charteris away, and his son is saved by being placed in a basket. The basket containing the infant is washed into a mystical valley where he is found by lamas. They raise, educate and train him, so that he is at the peak of physical and mental powers. He is also trained in magic. Before leaving to take his place in the outside world, he is given the power over flame. (A condensed/reworked origin appears in *The Flame* #1.) The Flame can emerge from flame (a match burning or any fire) and control flame, and is hot enough that bullets melt when they touch him. The earliest adventures have him taking on gangsters and mysterious evil ghouls. He uses his Flame Boat, Flame Car and Flame Plane to great advantage. Women are drawn to him as moths to a flame. "In the battle against crime and oppression you will find the Flame where the fighting is the thickest." By issue 23 (Mar 1941), he would burst into flame like the Human Torch, as opposed to using his Flame gun for the source of his flame power. Criminals and mad scientists kept him busy until Nazis and fifth columnists became his foes as of issue 26 (Jun 1941).

With the addition of U.S. Jones, a patriotic hero, in issue 28 and the introduction of a civilian alias as Gary Preston, and the addition of Flame Girl in *Wonderworld Comics* #30 (Oct 1941), obviously the popularity of the Flame was burning less brightly. The promotional ad for her appearance is rather dramatic:

The Flame lay there, on the ground, helpless, dying...and if he passed on, so would all those innocent people whom he had sworn to protect.... But there was still one way he could come to their rescue, by passing the secret of his flame powers on to the one person he could trust the most....Linda Dale...

But Linda Dale had scorned him...had called Gary Preston, in reality the Flame, a yellow coward—she had threatened to aid her uncle, a fugitive from the law...would she use the Flame powers for good, or through her uncle would all of Gary Preston's good work fall into the hands of the underworld?

But the introduction of a new supporting character was not enough to save the Flame from being replaced as the cover feature on *Wonderworld Comics* #32 (Dec 1941) by U.S. Jones. The Flame was extinguished, with the rest of the Fox characters, mere months later.

The Blue Beetle

The second "costumed hero" to be created by the Eisner Shop actually started as second banana to the Green Mask which was the lead cover feature for most of the earliest *Mystery Men Comics* issues. Created by Charles Wojtkowski (Charles Nicholas), the Blue Beetle was a derivative of the Green Hornet and was to spawn another colorful insect hero with the Red Bee in *Hit Comics* when Eisner created a new universe of characters for Quality Comics in early 1940. In his initial adventure he sported a suit and mask ala the Green Hornet. He was a rookie cop, Dan Garrett. In the second issue he wore an all blue garb, but with face exposed. Realizing by his third adventure that it was tough to be a masked hero without a mask, he began to don the well-known domino mask. "When crime shows its head, the Blue Beetle is always on hand!" It is not until issue 13 that it is stated that Dan Garrett obtained his super-energy by ingesting "Vitamin 2X," which was distributed by his local super-hero helping pharmacist, Dr. Franz. (Also, rather novel for comics, the cover for issue 13 is derived directly from a panel in the Blue Beetle story.) The Beetle would flash a Blue Beetle light before he pounced on the bad guys (and I thought the Spider-Man light was all Spidey). By issue 14, he confronts his first nemesis, The Skull, who is leading attacks on America to promote the interests of the "fatherland." (Interestingly The Skull appeared as the protagonist the following month in a *different* strip, "Lt. Drake of the U.S. Naval Intelligence.")

Fox, noticing that the Blue Beetle was the most popular of his characters aggressively pursued "marketing" of this character in the manner of Superman. First appearing in *Mystery Men Comics* #1 (Aug 1939), the Blue Beetle made his first cover appearance and moved to the first feature in *Mystery Men Comics* #7 (Feb 1940) followed by his own comicbook appearing in January 1940 (cover dated Mar 1940). This was not a coincidence as the newspaper syndication of Blue Beetle also began in January 1940. Syndication only lasted until mid-March. Fox was undaunted in his attempt to emulate the marketing success of Superman, and Blue Beetle began a radio show on May 15, 1940 starring Frank Lovejoy that continued for forty-eight episodes until September 13, 1940. During this time Fox Features sponsored a "Blue Beetle Day" on August 7, 1940 at the New York World's Fair.

Drawn by a number of artists through the 1940s, many of his stories were scripted by Robert Kanigher, who contributed a number of features in the Golden Age for MLJ, Fox

shop was Editors Press Service. Editors Press Service syndicated material for English magazines such as *Wags* and *Okay Comics*. These early features included material such as Sheena which was *reprinted* in the first issues of *Jumbo Comics* as the shop produced material for Fiction House. In fact, the unique layout of panels that soon characterized the Eisner Shop style, was said to derive from the shape of panels as Eisner formatted the syndicated material to fit in a comicbook form

The shop produced material for other comic publishers such as Victor Fox, Everett Arnold's Quality Comics and early issues of *Speed Comics* for Worth Publications. (Eisner drew the cover for *Speed Comics* #1, Oct 1939.) Early on, so to convince would-be customers that the shop had the staff depth to produce on time, Eisner would produce strips with different styles and pen names (W. Morton Thomas, Spencer Steele, William Rensie, etc).

Eisner brought true production line efficiency to his "slave galley," as he would quip. Desk at the front, the process was broken down into production parts as Eisner, always the master of design, would exhort and trade art styles with the artists who joined the growing shop. The "galley" turned into a "classroom," where each artist learned from one another and perfected their storytelling talents. "Our shop was almost like a school. We really worked together. We all sort of developed as we worked."

In order to run a successful quality shop and beat the competition, Eisner decided to hire artists on salary as opposed to on a freelance basis. He believed that this arrangement gave him total control. Changes he wanted would not be a problem since the artist's time was his any way. This gave him the creative control that he wanted. As an accomplished artist he viewed himself as a "player manager." He contributed to the art ideas and roughed out many of the covers that were ultimately produced. As described by George Tuska, Eisner was "a producer, director and actor on paper."

Most of the shop artists saw the production of comicbooks as a stepping stone to the more lucrative and prestigious world of "illustration." Eisner was different. He not only saw the business potential of this medium but also saw the tremendous potential of comicbooks as a storytelling medium. Eisner, although an innovator in design and layout, viewed the art as it ultimately related to "storytelling." For Eisner it was always about the story, with the art being the means of telling that story. Word and art had to be integrated as a whole to tell the tale. Simply stated, "It was an arrangement of pictures in sequence to tell a story." Light and shading brought dynamism to the drawn page. It has been said that the "lighting" effects that he used were derived from lighting of the early theater performances he observed as well as films of the era. Broken panels, figures

jumping off the page, Eisner storytelling art was not confined to the four corners of a panel or page of art. As Eisner observed, "One could not help but be 'original' because there was no precedent."

But with success came the yearning of Eisner to expand his audience beyond the "twelve year old cretins from Kansas" as quipped by Eisner. His desire was to reach an older, more mature audience. That opportunity presented itself from Everett Arnold and Henry Martin in late 1939. Arnold had sold presses to Eastern Color and wanted to get into the comicbook business. Early on, he purchased strips from Martin for his book, *Feature Funnies*. Sunday newspapers were feeling the competition of new comic magazines. Martin and Arnold came up with the idea of producing a weekly comicbook to be part of the Sunday newspaper. Eisner's reputation of reliable delivery of material made him a natural for Arnold and Martin to approach. Although Eisner questioned his ability to produce this book within the time constraints, he saw this as an opportunity to escape the "comic book ghetto" and satisfy his literary aspirations by having access to an older audience. Although war was inevitable and his draft into the armed services a sure thing, Eisner agreed to this new partnership with Arnold and Martin. Thus the groundwork was laid for his seminal creation, The Spirit, which first appeared June 2, 1940. (As part of the overall deal, in a unique arrangement, Eisner demanded, and received, ownership interest in three Quality titles—*Smash Comics, Hit Comics* and *National Comics.)* Eisner sold his interest in the shop to Iger and, by agreement, took Bob Powell, Lou Fine and Chuck Mazoujian with him. On March 28, 1940 the new group moved to 202 East 44th Street—Tudor City. The artists he brought with him wanted to get away from packaging books to order. They sought more freedom in a creative sense.

With these men as a base, Eisner assembled perhaps the finest artists ever to produce comicbooks. Joining the group was Reed Crandall, Jack Cole, Nick Cardy, Bob Fujitani, Alex Kotzky, Dave Berg, Tex Blaisdell and Chuck Cuidera, and a teenager, Joe Kubert. This group produced material for the expanding line of Quality Comics such as *Police Comics, Military Comics, Hit Comics, Crack Comics*, etc. After he was drafted, Lou Fine and others continued work on The Spirit. Arnold, at this point, moved the Tudor City artists up to Stamford, Connecticut merging the "Eisner artists" with the "Arnold artists."

Following the war, Eisner believed that those years and his own maturation affected the stories he wanted to tell and the way he wanted to tell them. Through The Spirit Eisner was able to address important social issues as his art served as the vehicle to tell the story he wanted. For Eisner, it was always the story that mattered.

To this day, Will Eisner remains the master storyteller, the "true Spirit" of comicbooks.

and Fawcett. In 1946 he moved over to DC and scripted many features for DC Golden Age heroes. Later he created for DC such features as Sgt. Rock and Metal Men and many other characters. He edited many of the Big Five war books of DC and scripted the Haunted Tank for fifteen years. His prolific career and writing was intertwined with sixty years of comicbook creation.

One of the few characters of the non-DC and non-Timely world to make it to present times, the Blue Beetle has survived the first and second demise of Fox Publications before being resurrected by Charlton Publications and then by DC Comics. He actually made it to the "hit list" of Dr. Wertham, as exemplifying all that was wrong with comicbooks, as the industry was assaulted in the early 1950s.

Samson

Samson is the direct descendant of the Biblical Samson and wears the same general style of clothes (loincloth and sandals). His initial adventures have him taking on despotic rulers or "hatchers" of fiendish plots. "Where there is injustice and despair" you will find Samson. He has great super strength and can perform huge leaps. His feats of strength are incredible. His main method of travel was power-walking (except in issue 4 when Professor Brun helps him get about with a "decomposing ray"—which is just like the transporter beam in *Star Trek*). By issue 3, Samson hits the big city and finds it less conspicuous to travel about if he wears a suit. *Fantastic Comics* #3 features what some consider *the* classic Lou Fine cover. (Note the cover art subject of issue 3 is fitting for the robot story in issue 4.)

From mad scientists to mechanical giant robots to fighting Eelo the Fishman and monsters created by "crazed" doctors, Samson's exploits were truly "fantastic." He loses his power if his hair is cut as one learns in the eighth issue, but one also learns that even if cut, it re-grows quickly (issue 12). As many heroes of the day, after

the advent of Robin, Samson rescues and gains a boy assistant named David in issue 10 (Sep 1940—the same month the Green Mask got his boy side-kick). David's main role was to get into trouble for Samson to rescue him and to crack one-liners at the bad guys. They were fairly conspicuous as they strolled the city streets bare-chested with loin cloths. Samson's main shtick was to toss trucks, ships and buildings around, which seemed to interfere with the plans of most evil-doers.

The Green Mask

Little was known about the Green Mask in his first stories. Drawn by Walter Frehm (a/k/a Walter Frame), he was an acrobatic crime fighter whose identity had to be kept secret until "society was purged of crime." As opposed to the monosyllabic and taciturn Blue Beetle, the Green Mask was a rather glib fellow. The following can sum up his attitude. Tied tightly by ropes, the bad guy tells him: "Before I kill you, Green Mask, I will give you a demonstration of my great powers"...To which G.M. replies: "Before I'm thru with you, I'll give a demonstration of my left hook!" By issue 12 (Jul 1940) the first hints of America entering the coming war become the subject matter of the strip.

In issue 13, we learn that the Green Mask is Michael Selby, an independently wealthy private eye. His powers were given by exposure to the "vita-ray." He is placed in a "vita-ray" chamber and subjected to "super-charged shocks." (Note with issue 13, the editor felt compelled to "enhance" the powers of both the Green Mask and Blue Beetle by outside power sources.) He can now leap through the air and has increased strength. Without any introduction he is suddenly assisted by Domino, The Miracle Boy (move over Boy Wonder) commencing in issue 14 (Sep 1940).

Down but not out

Just as America joined the war and the super heroes of America had super villains of the Axis to fight, Fox Publications joined a number of publishers that went under. Fox was forced into involuntary bankruptcy on March 6, 1942 by a number of his creditors including Bulkley, Dunton & Co., Phelps Publishing and Chemical Photo Engraving Inc., with monies owed in excess of $100,000. (This was due, probably, in no small part to the fact its distributor, Colonial News, Inc. went under, owing Fox Publishing $173,551.) The last Fox issue was *V. .Comics* #2 (Mar 1942), which hit the stands in January 1942. *Blue Beetle Comics*, after a short hiatus, was picked up by Holyoke Publishing and continued with issue 12 (Jun 1942).

On February 15, 1944 Fox filed a petition to emerge from involuntary bankruptcy by proposing "to pay creditors 33 1/3% of net proceeds of the magazine *Blue Beetle*." Continuing as Fox Feature Syndicate, Inc., Fox started a new line of comics and wrested *Blue Beetle Comics* back from Holyoke Publishing Co. with issue 31, cover dated June 1944.

Note that toward the end of the run of the titles that the Fox "publication" offices moved from Springfield to Holyoke, Massachusetts. Holyoke Publishing Co. began publication with *Catman Comics*, with its first issue being produced cover dated February 1942, just as the Fox titles went under. The Holyoke title *Capt. Aero Comics* started with issue 7, picking up the numbering from *Samson Comics* #6. The first *Blue Beetle* comic for Holyoke was cover dated June 1942. Although the editorial office address in New York City was different for each company, the "Office of publication" had the same address: 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Massachusetts. The link to Holyoke, as a "holding" company for the most popular of the Fox characters, has yet to be explored. See, for example, *Fox Feature Syndicate, Inc. v. Holyoke Publishing Co Inc* , 56 N.Y.S.2d 395 (1945) as Fox Syndication, Inc. fought over debts and ownership with this company and the bankruptcy trustee for Fox Publications.

Fox Features had a successful rebirth during the mid- and late1940s producing crime, humor and "good girl" comics (integrating its business by buying a paper mill on October 23, 1947 and purchasing a printing company). However, as the new decade began, Fox Feature Syndicate was forced to file a voluntary petition for bankruptcy on July 15, 1950 along with its wholly owned subsidiary, Central Color Printing in an attempt to obtain protection from its creditors. The company tried to rearrange its debts via petition dated March 27, 1951. However, listing debts of $775,000 versus assets of only $30,000 as of July 31, 1951, a bankruptcy receiver was appointed for the company on August 2, 1951. The company was unable to emerge from bankruptcy, and Fox himself declared personal bankruptcy on May 29, 1952.

As a final note, Robert Farrell, the right hand business "associate" of Victor Fox brought back reworked versions of The Flame and Samson in his short-lived Ajax-Farrell titles that joined the brief—the very brief—Golden Age super hero resurgence in 1954-1955. (Farrell even recycled the name *Fantastic Comics* for a similar brief period.) However, the brief resurgence of Golden Age super heroes and the post-war production of comicbooks by Fox are, as one says, stories for another day.

The author would like to acknowledge, in addition to primary materials, the reference works of Howard Keltner, Jerry Bails, Ron Goulart, Mike Benton, Will Eisner, Joe Simon, Robert Harvey and interviews conducted by Dave Armstrong

The Adventures of Patsy
Trademark Applied for U. S. Patent Office
EACH OF THESE CONTROL BOXES CONTROLS SEVERAL OF OUR MECHANICAL SOLDIERS THE PHANTOM AND MYSELF WILL OPERATE THREE SOLDIERS EACH, AND YOU AND THIMBLE WILL OPERATE ONE SOLDIER APIECE
THAT MAKES EACH OF US A GENERAL
EVERY THING IS IN READINESS. WE WILL MARCH TO THE UNDERGROUND COURT KING GOOF WILL HAVE TO PASS THERE BEFORE HE REACHES MY CASTLE!
FORWARD....MARCH!

The Adventures of Patsy
Trademark Applied for U. S. Patent Office
YOU PROMISED US THIS WAS A BATTLE BETWEEN MECHANICAL MEN ONLY. SUPPOSE KING GOOF'S MAN SHOULD WIN, AND TURN ON US!
I DON'T WISH TO CAUSE UNDUE ALARM! WE WILL HAVE TO TAKE THAT CHANCE
NOE IS SO HARD LUCK HUNTS US AND HAUNTS US
LOOK
NUMBERS ONE, TWO AND THREE .. CHARGE!

The Dawn of Super Man

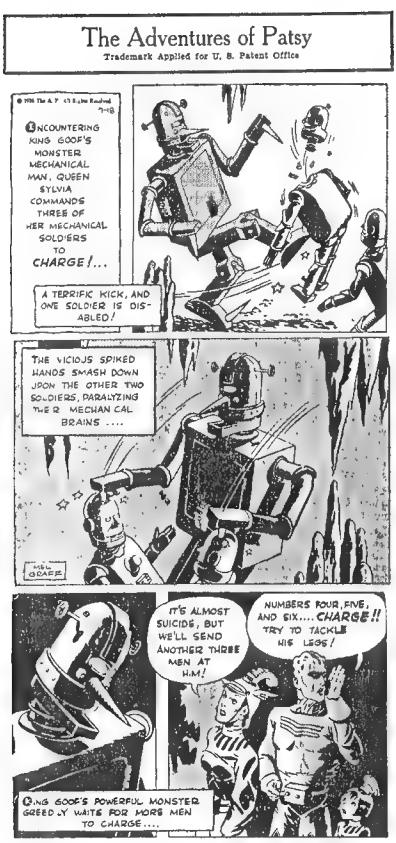
[continued from page 30]

hardboiled, whizzing action. They now offer something else; real people with real problems."

Turner knew what he was talking about. Until he burned out in '41, he was one of the most prolific comic book writers of that formative era. In three whirlwind years, a complete revolution had been staged, and Superman was the prime instigator.

Even Lester Dent was forced to scale back the original superman, Doc Savage.

"...after the flood of super-people, phantoms, bat-men and such people that Doc started coming out of the cartoonists' and writers' inkwells my stomach kind of turned," he admitted in 1945. "I've toned Doc down now to where he is not the slam bang fire-eater he was He still discovers strange tribes of people in the heart of one of the world's deserts, but he doesn't discover nations in the Earth's interior anymore. And there's another thing about Doc that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7-18
ENCOUNTERING KING GOOF'S MONSTER MECHANICAL MAN, QUEEN SYLVIA COMMANDS THREE OF HER MECHANICAL SOLDIERS TO CHARGE!...
A TERRIFIC KICK, AND ONE SOLDIER IS DISABLED!
THE VICIOUS SPIKED HANDS SMASH DOWN UPON THE OTHER TWO SOLDIERS, PARALYZING THEIR MECHANICAL BRAINS ....
MEL GRAFF
IT'S ALMOST SUICIDE, BUT WE'LL SEND ANOTHER THREE MEN AT HIM!
NUMBERS FOUR, FIVE, AND SIX... CHARGE!! TRY TO TACKLE HIS LEGS!
KING GOOF'S POWERFUL MONSTER GREEDILY WAITS FOR MORE MEN TO CHARGE....

The Adventures of Patsy
Trademark Applied for U. S. Patent Office
KING GOOF'S MONSTROUS MECHANICAL MAN HAS PUT THREE OF THE QUEEN'S MEN OUT OF COMMISSION....
THE BATTLE IS BEGINNING TO LOOK HOPELESS, BUT THE QUEEN HAS ORDERED THE PHANTOM TO SEND HIS THREE MEN INTO THE FRAY.
TACKLE HIS LEGS YOU IRON OAFS!
SUDDENLY THE METAL MONSTER DOES A STRANGE THING. HE PULLS OUT HIS NOSE!... A HOT, LIQUID FIRE HISSES FORTH, MELTING THE CHARGING IRON SOLDIERS LIKE SO MUCH CANDLE WAX
7-10
IT IS FOOLHARDY TO LINGER! LET US RETREAT.
NO! WE STILL HAVE TWO MORE MECHANICAL MEN LEFT, AND NOW WE'RE GOING TO FIGHT KING GOOF WITH MAGIC!
NASTY CHAP
MEL GRAFF

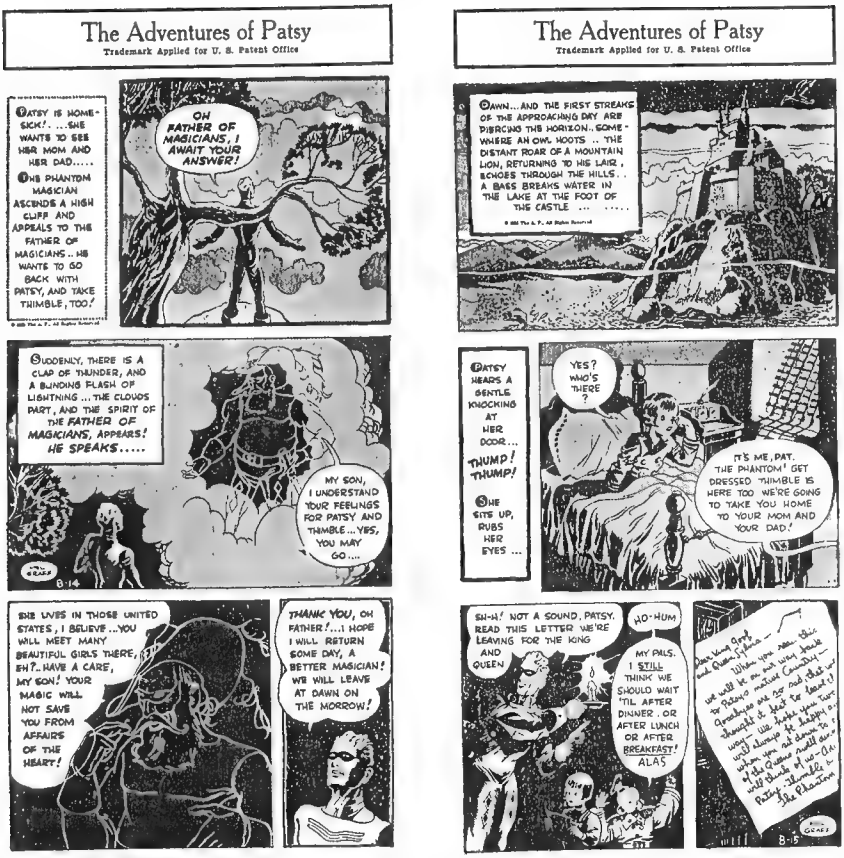
I want you to note, too: *He has never left this planet.* No matter how much it handicaps him to stay here on Earth, he has never abandoned us and moved the scene of his operations to some other planet."

More spot illustrations by Mel Graff from the **Phantom Detective** pulp.

The Phantom Super Man Strip

Lost in all the frenzy is the fact that Superman was beaten into print by an earlier, now forgotten caped superhuman. You've probably never head of the Phantom Magician, and thereby hangs a lost bit of lore.

In 1935, he showed up in Mel Graff's *The Adventures of Patsy*, a newspaper strip about a little girl's adventures in an Alice in Wonderland magic realm. Looking like a cross between Mandrake the Magician and Lee Falk's Phantom, The Phantom Magician wore a quast-military


The Adventures of Patsy
Trademark Applied for U. S. Patent Office
PATSY IS HOME-SICK!... SHE WANTS TO SEE HER MOM AND HER DAD.....
THE PHANTOM MAGICIAN ASCENDS A HIGH CLIFF AND APPEALS TO THE FATHER OF MAGICIANS.. HE WANTS TO GO BACK WITH PATSY, AND TAKE THIMBLE, TOO!
OH FATHER OF MAGICIANS, I AWAIT YOUR ANSWER!
SUDDENLY, THERE IS A CLAP OF THUNDER, AND A BLINDING FLASH OF LIGHTNING ... THE CLOUDS PART, AND THE SPIRIT OF THE FATHER OF MAGICIANS, APPEARS! HE SPEAKS.....
MY SON, I UNDERSTAND YOUR FEELINGS FOR PATSY AND THIMBLE... YES, YOU MAY GO...
B-14
SHE LIVES IN THOSE UNITED STATES, I BELIEVE... YOU WILL MEET MANY BEAUTIFUL GIRLS THERE, EH?.. HAVE A CARE, MY SON! YOUR MAGIC WILL NOT SAVE YOU FROM AFFAIRS OF THE HEART!
THANK YOU, OH FATHER!... I HOPE I WILL RETURN SOME DAY, A BETTER MAGICIAN! WE WILL LEAVE AT DAWN ON THE MORROW!
The Adventures of Patsy
Trademark Applied for U. S. Patent Office
DAWN... AND THE FIRST STREAKS OF THE APPROACHING DAY ARE PIERCING THE HORIZON.. SOMEWHERE AN OWL HOOTS .. THE DISTANT ROAR OF A MOUNTAIN LION, RETURNING TO HIS LAIR, ECHOES THROUGH THE HILLS.. A BASS BREAKS WATER IN THE LAKE AT THE FOOT OF THE CASTLE ... .
PATSY HEARS A GENTLE KNOCKING AT HER DOOR... THUMP! THUMP!
SHE SITS UP, RUBS HER EYES ...
YES? WHO'S THERE?
IT'S ME, PAT. THE PHANTOM! GET DRESSED THIMBLE IS HERE TOO. WE'RE GOING TO TAKE YOU HOME TO YOUR MOM AND YOUR DAD!
SH-H! NOT A SOUND, PATSY. READ THIS LETTER WE'RE LEAVING FOR THE KING AND QUEEN
NO-HUM
MY PALS. I STILL THINK WE SHOULD WAIT 'TIL AFTER DINNER. OR AFTER LUNCH OR AFTER BREAKFAST! ALAS
B-15

uniform that seemed to be a conglomeration of aviator togs and scarf, replete with cavalry gloves and buccaneer boots *a la* Captain America. He sported a thin domino mask and sometimes a cape and swashbuckler's cocked hat, accented by a jaunty plume. The Phantom Magician—as he was usually styled—possessed magical abilities, not the least of which was the power of flight. He also vaguely resembled Graff's drawings of an earlier Phantom, a domino-masked pulp hero whose first adventure Graff illustrated back in the February 1933 issue of *The Phantom Detective*. So we can be pretty certain the Phantom Detective inspired the Phantom Magician—at least in part.

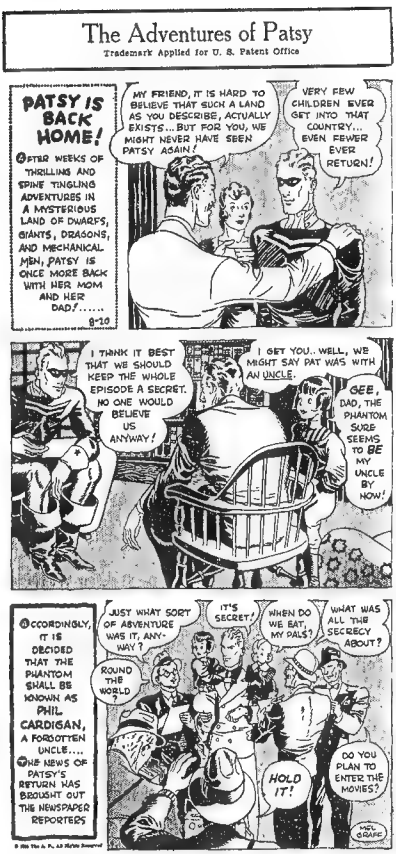
When the faltering *Patsy* was retooled into a Hollywood moppet in the vein of Shirley Temple, the Phantom Magician was magically transfigured into Patsy's "Uncle" Phil Cardigan, never again to fly through the air or make swords appear in his naked hand

But how did Mel Graff come to prefigure Superman years before he reached honest print? Or for that matter, anticipate Lee Falk's Phantom, who debuted in 1936?

Well, in the days between 1933 and 1938, Jerry Siegel was feverishly trying to peddle Superman to anyone who would give him a chance. Newspaper syndicates and fly-by-night pulp publishers by the bushel rejected the Man of Steel.

At different points during his long quest for a home for Superman, Jerry

The Adventures of Patsy
Trademark Applied for U. S. Patent Office
PATSY USED TO LOVE THESE ROSES. IF ONLY SHE COULD SEE THEM NOW
AM I SEEING THINGS?
PATSY
MOM
ARE WE IN TIME FOR BREAKFAST, MADAM?
A FEW MINUTES LATER, THE PHONE RINGS AT THE OFFICE WHERE PATSY'S DAD WORKS.
JANET! DO YOU REALIZE WHAT YOU ARE SAYING?
WHEE!
TAKE THE DAY OFF, MISS NIPHTY, PATSY IS BACK!
8-19


The Adventures of Patsy
Trademark Applied for U. S. Patent Office
PATSY IS BACK HOME!
AFTER WEEKS OF THRILLING AND SPINE TINGLING ADVENTURES IN A MYSTERIOUS LAND OF DWARFS, GIANTS, DRAGONS, AND MECHANICAL MEN, PATSY IS ONCE MORE BACK WITH HER MOM AND HER DAD!.....
9-10
MY FRIEND, IT IS HARD TO BELIEVE THAT SUCH A LAND AS YOU DESCRIBE, ACTUALLY EXISTS...BUT FOR YOU, WE MIGHT NEVER HAVE SEEN PATSY AGAIN!
VERY FEW CHILDREN EVER GET INTO THAT COUNTRY... EVEN FEWER EVER RETURN!
I THINK IT BEST THAT WE SHOULD KEEP THE WHOLE EPISODE A SECRET. NO ONE WOULD BELIEVE US ANYWAY!
I GET YOU.. WELL, WE MIGHT SAY PAT WAS WITH AN UNCLE.
SEE, DAD, THE PHANTOM SUIT SEEMS TO BE MY UNCLE BY NOW!
ACCORDINGLY, IT IS DECIDED THAT THE PHANTOM SHALL BE KNOWN AS PHIL CARDIGAN, A FORGOTTEN UNCLE.... THE NEWS OF PATSY'S RETURN WAS BROUGHT OUT THE NEWSPAPER REPORTERS
JUST WHAT SORT OF ADVENTURE WAS IT, ANYWAY?
IT'S SECRET!
WHEN DO WE EAT, MY PALS?
WHAT WAS ALL THE SECRECY ABOUT?
ROUND THE WORLD
HOLD IT!
DO YOU PLAN TO ENTER THE MOVIES?

Siegel and Joe Shuster got very discouraged. When one obscure Chicago publisher reneged on a promise to publish Superman in a magazine of his own, Shuster blamed himself and burned the pages. He was discouraged enough to hunt around for another artist, one more experienced, with good contacts in the newspaper game.

One of those was Mel Graff, then drawing *Patsy*. In later years, he recalled receiving a letter from a young Jerry Siegel offering him the opportunity to draw an exciting new comic strip. But first he would have to sign a notarized statement promising not to steal the idea.

"It was too much trouble," recalled Graff in later years. "All cartoonists get letters like that. I wrote the guy I was flattered, but wasn't interested."

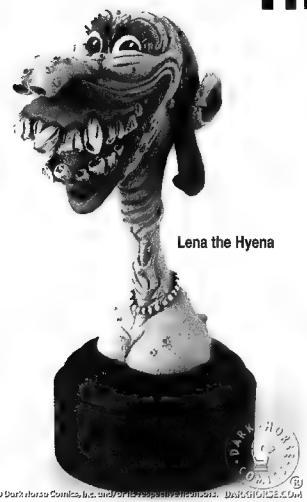
Graff, who joked that he was the man who turned down Superman, may have declined the opportunity, but you have to wonder what triggered Siegel's letter? Did he see the Phantom Magician in print and think, "Mel Graff is the perfect guy to draw Superman?" Or did Siegel's query predate the Magician, and Graff got enough of an inkling of the concept to inspire him?

Or could it be as simple as the Phantom Magician inspired Siegel and Shuster to put a colorful costume on their character, who in his earliest prototype wore simply an undershirt and pants?

That super-mystery may never be solved.

by Mike Wilbur

"The Horror! The Horror!"



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As Colonel Kurtz melodramatically indicated at the end of *Apocalypse Now*, horror has been a staple of fiction since fiction began. And the illustrated fiction we call comics is no exception. Comic book history is rich with horror stories, both subtle and excessive. It survived a Congressional witch-hunt in the '50s (it just laid low for a while until things cooled down), and has enjoyed resurgences with varying degrees of success in each succeeding decade.

So, it was inevitable with the dawn of comic character statues in the early '90s that many of our fiends, both old and new, from comic book horror would find their way into three dimensional stardom.

Perhaps most noteworthy is the early debut of **EC Comics** venerated trio of "Ghoulunatics," The Crypt-Keeper, The Vault-Keeper and The Old Witch, the respective hosts of EC's anthology titles *Tales from the Crypt*, *Vault of Horror* and *Haunt of Fear*. Designed by renowned illustrator William Stout, the Ghastly Trio were sculpted by **Bowen Designs** and marketed by **Graphitti Designs**. The Crypt-Keeper was released in 1994, with The Old Witch and The Vault-Keeper following in 1995.

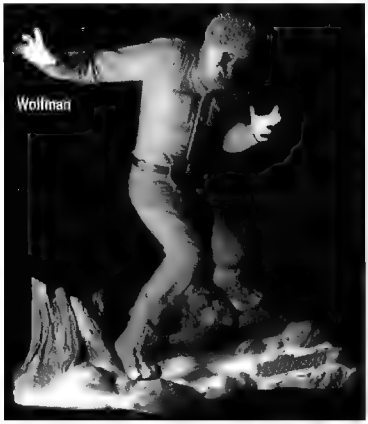
Three more familiar faces made their sculpted debut in the mid-'90s. Although not primarily known for their comic book incarnations, their exploits have been adapted/parodied/homaged/reinvented/extrapolated countless times in four-color print. I'm referring, of course, to the *other* revered trio of horror, Dracula, Frankenstein's Monster and the Wolfman.

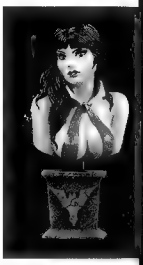
Bowen Designs, in collaboration with **Dark Horse Comics**, produced a statue of Bela Lugosi as King of the Vampires in 1997. Due to a quirky copyright situation, they were not legally permitted to use the name Dracula anywhere on the statue or packaging, even though the depiction was obviously based on Lugosi's portrayal in the 1931 Universal Studios film.

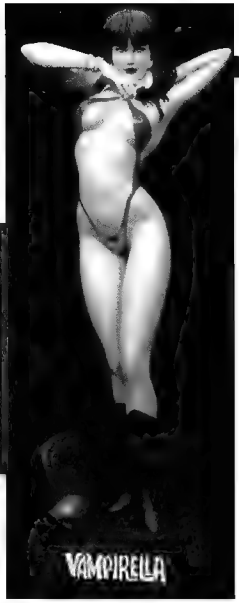
In 1998, **Moore Creations** released the less-ambiguously named Wolfman, based on Lon Chaney Jr.'s 1941 portrayal, and the Boris Karloff inspired Frankenstein's Monster from the original 1931 *Frankenstein*.

Back to the realm of comic books, we find an assortment of releases from **DC Direct**, based on characters from the **Vertigo** comics imprint. Among the featured characters have been the Sandman (three different statues plus two mini-statues), his sister Death (two different statues plus one mini),

The Horror! The Horror! ro







Vampirella: a 12-inch statue in 1999, a medium statue in 2001 and a mini-bust in 2001.

Vampirella has also been "statue-ized" on other occasions by other studios. **Harris Comics**, current publisher of *Vampirella* comics, released a statue in mid-2003. Graphitti Designs produced a Vampirella 25th Anniversary statue in the mid-'90s, based on a painting Frank Frazetta created for the occasion.

Fans of the bizarre art of the legendary **Basil Wolverton** were treated to a series of five busts produced by Dark Horse Comics in the late '90s under the "Wolverton's Weirdos" banner. Characters presented were Liz, Sy, Artie, Karen and Wolverton's rendition of Al Capp's **Lena the Hyena**.

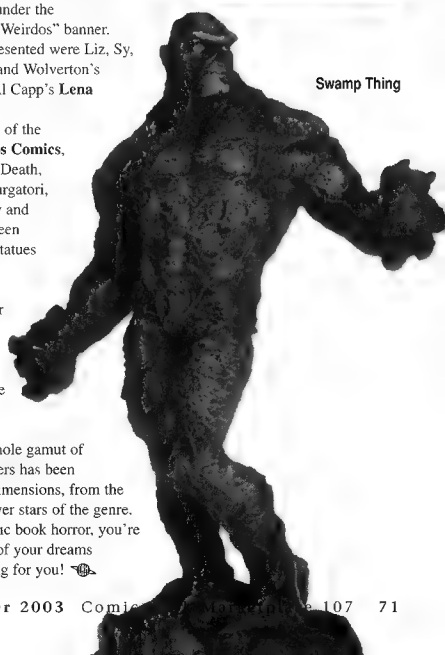
Characters of the defunct **Chaos Comics**, such as Lady Death, Evil Ernie, Purgatori, Jade, Chastity and others have been produced as statues and busts by **Diamond Select**. Earlier statue releases of Lady Death and Evil Ernie were produced by Moore Creations.

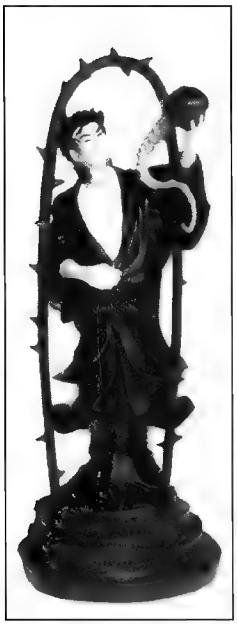
Pretty much the whole gamut of comics horror characters has been translated into three dimensions, from the old classics to the newer stars of the genre. If you're a fan of comic book horror, you're sure to find the fiend of your dreams (or nightmares) waiting for you!

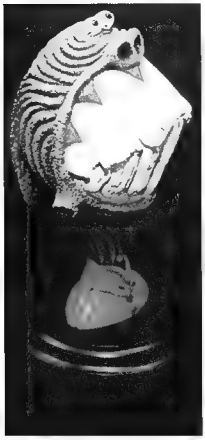
Frankenstein's Monster

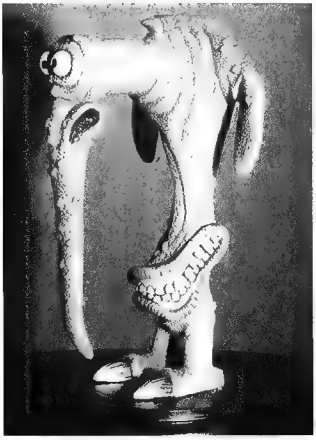
Hellblazer's John Constantine, Preacher's Jesse Custer, and the Swamp Thing (one statue plus one mini). Coming in late '03 and throughout '04 is a bi-monthly line of Vertigo character mini busts. The first three characters scheduled to appear are Merv Pumpkinhead, Sandman (Morpheus), and Lucifer.

Moore Creations produced three different renditions of the legendary


Swamp Thing







(above)
Sandman
Death
Pumpkinhead

(left)
Wolverton Weirdos:
Sy
Liz
Artie

by Michael Naiman

Bits and Pieces (I'm in Pieces)

Bits and Pieces from around the collecting world: An issue of *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories* #500 (Gold Key) of the original printer's blue line proof printed in blue on thick stat paper and in VF/NM condition sold for $30. Under the heading of *D'oh!*, a copy of *Simpsons Comics* #1 has sold for $63 (**7.87X *Guide***) Cowabunga! And for those Whitman Publishing disbelievers: *Winnie the Pooh* #22 VF/NM which *Guides* for $17 has sold for $81 That's **4.76X** *Guide*!

The 1950 Wheaties Cereal mail in promotion for the four complete sets (with original mailer envelopes) has sold for $715. There were eight Disney comics in each mailer for a total of 32 in the set. The set advertised on the Wheaties Cereal boxes could originally be obtained after mailing in the order blank on the cereal box along with 15 cents and one Wheaties box top. The recipient would receive a manila envelope measuring 8 3/4"x3 1/2" Each envelope would contain a set of eight "pocket sized" books. The sets were labeled A, B, C and D. The pocket size books measure 6 3/4"x2 1/2". Very few of these complete sets ever appear with the original mailers—especially with all of them being sent to the same individual—as these were!

A copy of *Amazing Fantasy* #15 (CGC Qualified 6.0 Incomplete) has sold for $1675. This unrestored copy had ten pages missing (7-16), however the Spider-Man story was complete. Someone wanted this story *real* bad.

My Harvey specialist, Quinton Clem, reports that these days any and all Hot Stuff comics are bringing *Guide* and multiples of *Guide* (at least on eBay). While many of these do not have high "book value" they still remain affordable at multiples of *Guide*! *Richie Rich Millions* #1 VG $51, #10 FN $ 32 99; *Richie Rich* #3 FA+ $44, #5 FN- $86.77, #15 FA $12; *Friendly Ghost Casper* #117 VG+ $26 (**6.5X *Guide***); *Casper's Ghostland* #15 FN $16; *Hot Stuff* #31 VG $51 (**6.3X *Guide***); *Hot Stuff Sizzlers* #42 VG $15; *Wendy* #1 NM- $218 (**87% of *Guide***); *Harvey Hits* #7 VG+ $107 (First comic devoted to Wendy the Witch, **2.55X *Guide***); *Playful Little Audrey* #1 FN+ $127 (**1.85X *Guide***); *Richie Rich Money World* #1 CGC 9.4 $355 (**5X *Guide***); *Richie Rich Fortunes* #52 NM- $15 (**3.8X *Guide***); *Richie Rich Zillionz* #29 NM- $7 (**1.8X *Guide***); *Felix the Cat* #103 FN+ $14.

• • •

Now for something a little different. You have come to the point in your collecting "career" when you have all the super-hero spandex comics that you can handle. *"Is that all there is?"* you ask. Not hardly! In the last 20 years or so, there has been a tremendous explosion of reality stories that have hit the market and most of them in the trade paperback form. Nice looking, bookshelf-worthy tomes that you would not be embarrassed to show your friends. How many times have you experienced "the look" from a non-comic collecting cohort when you show him that Mylar-encased, "don't-touch-without-wearing gloves" copy of *Your Favorite Super-hero* #1?

At the top of my list for your exploration enjoyment would be Will Eisner's *A Contract With God: and Other Tenement Stories* followed by Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivors Tale: My Father Bleeds History* plus *And Here My Troubles Began*. You can follow that up with Frank Miller's *Sin City* and Harvey Pekar's *Cancer Years*, Joe Kubert's *Fax from Sarajevo* and Max Allan Collin's *The Road to Perdition*. I contacted some retailers about their customers' habits in buying trade paperbacks and graphic novels and they reported the following

• • •

Richard Evans of **Bedrock City** reports: I never price trades above cover price. We treat them purely as retail material. We will raise the price on some hard covers that are out of print and we have a ton of requests for or get a high price on eBay. But only if we pay more to get them in (i.e. buy them back from a collector or through another dealer). At some point I am sure there will be demand for first print trades (the Firesides come to mind) but I can't in good conscience promote them as a good investment as trades are already reprints. Week to week things change but some of our recent best sellers are: *Ultimate Spider-Man* Vol.1; *Y-the Last Man* Vol.1; *Ultimate X-Men* Vol. 6; *Fables*; *Watchmen*; *Mars*, *GTO*, *Love Hina* (these are anime and anime rules sales wise); *Superman* Vol. 5 - President Lex. Some perennial sellers are *Jonny the Homicidal Maniac*, *30 Days of Night*, *Transmetropolitan*, *Infinity Gauntlet* and *Secret Wars*.

• • •

Steven Bates, manager of **Bookery Fantasy**, in Fairborn Ohio reports: Our trade paperback best-sellers are mostly the same as everyone else's. *Watchman*, the Sandman and Preacher series, *Batman: Dark Knight Returns* and the Authority/Warren Ellis Stormwatch series. We genre and family rack (by company), to cross-pollinate sales, so we do get some "piggy-back" sales on other Vertigo and Batman titles, for example. In recent

[continued on page 75]

CBM Market Watch

A report of market indicator sales (including % of Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide) by Michael Naiman

Amazing Spider-Man
#42 VG $33 92%
#128 VF $13 44%
#194 VF $19 1.27X

Andy Panda
#31 VF/NM $15 79%
#34 VF/NM $15 79%
#45 VF/NM $15 79%

Augie Dogie
#1 NM (file) $125 50%
#1 NM (file) $118 47%

Avengers
#22 FN $17 82%
#12 VF $82 85%
#23 VG $17 1.38X
#25 VG+ $19 1.54X

Challengers of the Unknown
#4 GD $12 27%
#7 GD $30 66%
#9 VG $13 24%
#15 FN $42 78%
#16 VF+ $52 57%
#17 FN $15 38%

Charlie Chan (Prize)
#3 FN $140 93%

Cloak & Dagger (Ziff Davis)
#1 VG $55 1.02X

Detective
#235 VG $48 38%
#272 GD $12 55%
#273 FN $62 94%
#274 VF- $82 68%
#277 FN $26 41%
#278 FN $24 38%
#279 FN $24 37%
#281 FN $32 63%
#283 FN $32 63%
#327 VF+ $84 Guide

Devil Dinosaur
#1 NM- $3 19%

Doc Savage Comics
#1 VG- $900 93%

Doc Strange
#1 NM+ $62 89%

Donald Duck
#42 VF $21 49%
#43 VF/NM $33 59%
#44 VF $23 52%
#45 VF/NM $50 38%
#46 VF $44 30%
#47 VF $29 69%
#48 VF/NM $44 78%
#49 VF $31 74%

Flash (GA)
#61 FN $240 94%

Flash
#105 FN $652 56%
#106 VG $78 29%
#107 FN $112 53%
#109 FN $94 67%
#110 FN $202 60%
#111 FN $116 1.05X
#114 FN $59 68%

Flintstones
#3 NM- $34 96%

Joe Palooka
#7 NM- $135 90%
#25 VF+ $34 66%
#27 VF/NM $43 64%

Jonny Quest (GK)
#1 VF $143 54%

Journey into Mystery
#77 VG- $28 93%
#106 VF $25 36%

Journey into Unknown Worlds
#10 VG $70 64%
#28 VG+ $47 87%

Heart Throbs (Quality)
#2 VG+ $50 96%

House of Secrets
#112 NM+ $22 1.43X
#124 NM $20 1.95X
#125 NM $20 1.95X
#131 NM+ $11 1.1X
#132 NM $11 1.05X
#133 NM+ $13 1.25X

Incredible Hulk
#113 VF $20 59%
#118 VF+ $29 76%
#123 VF/NM $13 43%
#124 VF/NM $29 Guide
#181 NM "$1100" 96%

Iron Fist
#14 VF+ $71 91%
#14 FN+ $50 1.51X

Iron Man
#10 VF+ $44 1.1X

Jetsons (GK)
#13 VF/NM $25 34%

Jimmy Olsen
#9 VG $101 1.4X
#134 NM $125 1.39X

Jumbo
#83 VG $30 71%

Jungle
#5 VG $200 70%
#148 VF $48 49%

Justice League of America
#1 FN $860 Guide
#1 VG- $366 64%
#2 VG+ $76 59%
#9 FN+ $150 1.22X

Kamandi
#21 NM $8 63%
#25 NM $6 50%
#26 NM/MT $15 1.2X
#27 NM/MT $7 58%

Kid Colt Outlaw
#191 NM+ $5 38%
#192 NM+ $5 38%
#193 NM+ $7 54%
#196 NM- $4 35%
#197 NM $19 1.6X
#200 NM/MT $49 3.06X

Kobra
#1 NM- $5 48%

Korak
#1 VF $50 91%

Logan's Run
#1 NM- $5 48%

Lois Lane
#1 VG $317 56%
#1 VG $417 74%
#2 GD $108 1.48X
#9 VG $21 34%
#11 GD $19 1.09X
#12 GD $11 62%
#13 GD $8 44%

Looney Tunes
#6 NM- $484 51%
#8 NM- $453 48%
#16 NM $424 79%
#17 NM- $180 33%
#22 NM $256 57%
#23 NM $301 67%
#25 NM $329 73%
#27 GD $39 1.56X

Marvel Team-Up
#1 VF $70 77%
#12 NM- $24 92%

Masters of the Universe (1982)
#1 NM $10 1.6X

Metal Men
#1 VG $79 79%

Monsters on the Prowl
#10 NM $10 55%
#16 NM $10 50%
#18 NM $10 63%
#19 NM $10 63%
#20 NM $17 1.03X

Mystery in Space
#5 FN- $155 89%

New York Worlds Fair 1940
#nn VG "$1131" 50%

Our Army at War
#61 VG $13 50%

Our Gang
#10 GD $34 Guide

Out of the Night
#2 VG $54 56%

Planet
#49 VG+$72 59%

Pogo Possum
#13 FN $41 76%
#16 FN $41 76%

Rangers Comics

#29	VG	$10	17%

Rawhide Kid

#26	VF	$70	76%
#28	FN	$23	58%
#29	FN	$31	79%

Showcase

#4	GD	$998	84%
#13	GD	$145	47%
#15	VG	$300	99%
#22	VG	$566	86%

Strange Tales

#59	NM	$355	1.29X
#63	FN	$190	3.72X
#102	VF	$95	37%
#110	VG	$117	52%

Superboy

#76	VF-	$51	68%
#80	FN	$46	81%
#82	VF	$51	73%

Uncle Scrooge

#60	VF/NM	$74	85%
#61	VF+	$31	53%
#62	VF+	$31	53%
#63	VF/NM	$61	76%

Wonder Woman

#41	GD	$50	Guide
#200	VF+	$50	1.25X
#300	NM	$10	1.66X
#17	FN-	$320	1.05X

World's Best

#1	FN	"$2146"	50%

World's Finest

#4	VF	"$1100"	68%
#47	VG+	$119	1.04X
#90	FN	$29	33%

X-Men

#1	VG	"$1100"	95%
#12	FN	$71	68%
#14	VF	$209	94%
#94	GD	$60	1.03X
#134	NM	$40	88%
#141	NM	$42	84%

Michael Naiman Report

[continued from page 73]

months, the Ultimate line from Marvel has been a very high demand group, from the Ultimates through the X-Men and Spider-Man. Marvel trades have seen a triumphant comeback in the last few years, largely (I suspect) because of their "print-to-order" and "no reprints" policies. Some series that were once best sellers have languished lately, including Bone and Elfquest; perhaps these kinds of series have maxed out their readership.

Our biggest growth in recent memory comes, no surprise, from manga. Dark Horse, Viz and TokyoPop have all been very successful in building a "new" market (actually expanding on a cult market, capitalizing on the mainstream "discovery" of imported Japanese entertainment). *Lone Wolf and Cub*, *Akira*, *Oh My Goddess*, *Ranma 1/2*, *Dragonball Z* and *Fushigi Yugi* have all been frequently restocked to keep up with demand.

CrossGen Entertainment's recent introduction of "Traveler" editions (smaller versions of trade paperbacks, slightly larger than a digest, reminiscent of Japanese manga formats) has been very well-received by my customers.

Though serial comic book sales have been in a state of flux for several years, trade paperbacks and graphic novels have continued to grow in popularity, and have become more important to our sales philosophy.

• • •

Rory Root of **Comic Relief: The Bookstore** in Berkeley, California puts it: As the quantity of graphic novels and TPBs increases every week—and access to entry level Gold and Silver Age comics decline in the retail environment I foresee a continuation in this trend of sales.

Check out Rory's display at any West Coast convention and you'll see he backs this up with a huge inventory of TPBs and graphic novels.

• • •

More on **Motion Picture Funnies Weekly**: Empire Collectibles spokesman indicated that he had a conversation with the gentleman who first discovered the original find of *Motion Picture Funnies Weekly* in the estate of the deceased publisher

The person responsible for the discovery was unable to remember the exact number of copies in the original find: "*Five or six copies, I can't really remember.*" He described the books as one copy in Near Mint, one coverless copy and the remaining copies being in relatively the same condition: "*They all looked pretty nice but the spines were frayed.*"

When asked if he would have recommended that the "frayed" copies be restored: "*That would probably be a good idea, they were pretty frayed. I had my copy restored with paper along the spine.*" (His copy is the one that was loaned to Roy Thomas to photograph. The pictures of the interior were later used to reprint the Sub-Mariner story in *The Invaders* #20.)

Empire Collectibles questioned him concerning the page quality, whether he felt it was brown as stated in *The Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide* or if it was closer to tan to off-white: "*That's debatable.*" (The Heritage Auction F/VF is noted as tan to off-white pages.)

When asked why he thought that Overstreet suspects an additional copy may exist: "*There was a collector in the New York area who claimed to own a copy, but I don't think anything ever came from it.*" Along with the copies of *Motion Picture Funnies* was the original artwork for the covers of #1-4 but, unfortunately, no artwork from the interior pages. He sold his copy in the late '90s.

• • •

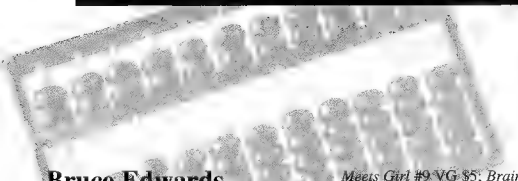
Joe Field of **Flying Colors Comics & Other Cool Stuff** wades in with: The TPB list is dominated by "old stand-bys"—stories that new readers keep finding, as old readers (and retailers) keep recommending them. 1) *Batman: Dark Knight Returns*, 2) *Watchmen*, 3) *Amazing Spider-Man: Coming Home*, 4) *Ultimate Spider-Man* Volume One, 5) *Sandman: A Doll's House*, 6) *Y the Last Man*, 7) *Astro City: Life in the Big City*, 8) *The Hobbit*, 9) *Marvels*, 10) *Ghost World*.

• • •

If I were to give you a list of trade paperback *series* that are the best-selling, it's dominated by manga such as *Blade of the Immortal*, *Ranma 1/2*, *Inu Yasha*, *Dragonball*, *Lone Wolf and Cub*, etc.

But here's the deal—and maybe this is simply a matter of semantics—I don't find we sell trade paperbacks to "collectors," but rather we sell them to readers. It's all about the ease of having an entire story in your hand, rather than the periodical chapters that traditional comic books offer If there's any collecting aspect to trade paperbacks, it's that many comic book fans feel that TPBs legitimize what they love and that the TPBs look great on a classy bookshelf (as opposed to how drab comic collector boxes look).

But lest we think that the periodical is going the way of the dinosaur, I believe that TPBs are slowly bringing back readers to comics who then start to buy monthly comics again. In other words, it's all good!



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Hello again everyone and happy collecting! Today's market is definitely one for the collector. It has never been easier to find comics with all the available means now at our disposal (conventions, mail order, shops, auctions and, especially, the Internet and eBay). A lot of comics are bringing very good prices compared to *The Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide* (and you will see some of those below) but a not-so-well-kept secret is that, due to the multitude of options available for the collector today, most comics are available for "fair" or even bargain basement prices. The keys to the best prices for accurately described comics are patience and due diligence when reviewing the seller and deciding if you want to do business with them or not.

As I have said before in these pages, eBay is a tricky marketplace but the clear keys are description, *large* pictures (and the more the better) and a good seller reputation with a lot of transactions. Even then it's a roll of the dice, but the odds of selling for a good price are dramatically increased.

Here are some of the **summer sales** we have completed on eBay, both great bargains and high prices relative to *Guide* are found:

Adventures of The Fly #1 color Xerox cover $26, another $27, #2 color Xerox cover $12; *All Famous Police Cases* #7 VG $17; *Apache Trail* #3 FA/GD $7; *Boris Karloff Thriller* #2 F/VF $8; *Boy Meets Girl* #9 VG $5; *Brain Boy* #1 (FC #1330) VG/F $13, #3 F/VF $7, #4 FN+ $8, #6 VG+ $5; *Bride's Diary* #5 VG $6; *Career Girl Romances* #40 VF $5, #48 VF+ $5; *Christmas Parade* #4 Dell Giant VG/F $10; *Cindy Comics* #27 (#1) FA+ $16, #29 FA/GD $15, #40 VF+ $46; *Comedy Comics* #3 G/VG $38, #5 VG $20, #11 VG/F $6; *Conan* #9 FN+ $5, #19 VF- $8; *Confessions of Love* #12 GD $13; *Crack Comics* #35 GD+ $21; *Crime Detective Comics* V2 #8 FA/GD $7; *Crime Does Not Pay* #55 VG/F $17, #59 VG $14, #60 VG $13, #63 VG/F $19, #65 VG- $7; *Daring Adventures* #15 VG/F $5; *Dear Beatrice Fairfax* #7 VG- $11; *Desperado* #1 VG/F $32; *Diary Secrets* #14 FA/GD $23; *Double Life of Private Strong* #1 color Xerox cover $16; *Ellery Queen* #1 (FC #1165) VG+ $8; *Exciting Romances* #10 VG+ $5; *First Romance* #33 G/VG $3; *Flash Gordon* #5 (1967) VG+ $6; *Flying Saucer Comics* #2 GD+ $3, #3 GD- $1, #4 VG/F $6; *Frankie Comics* #4 (#1) VG $16, #5 VG $16, #7 VG/F $16, #11 VG/F $20; *Gay Comics* #1 VF $248, #18 VG $75, #22 FN $44, #37 GD $19, #40 VG $25; *Girl Confessions* #22 VG $15, *Girls Romances* #11 FA $4; *Hedy De Vine* #23 VG+ $72, #24 VG $52, #25 VG/F $87, #28 VG/F $53, #30 VG $22; *Hercules* FC #1006 VG $16; *Iron Man & Submariner* #1 VG/F $11; *Jack Armstrong* #5 GD $6; *Jeanie Comics* #15 GD+ $25, #18 VG/F $44, #24 VG+ $34, #27 VG $33; *Joe Palooka* #29 VG $5; *Joker Comics* #20 FA- $11, #31 VG+ $34, #34 FA- $13, #39 GD $10, #42 VG+ $28; *Lana Comics* #5 VG $30, #7 GD $14; *Linda Lark Registered Nurse* #5 G/VG $8; *Little Iodine* #14 FA/GD $1; *Love Confessions* #10 (1951) PR $15; *Lovers* #23 (#1) G/VG $8; *Lovers Lane* #7 GD $3; *Lucy The Real Gone Gal* #1 VG $23; *Margie Comics* #35 (#1-1946) VG/F $143, #39 FN- $37, #41 FA/GD $15, #44 FA/GD $15, #45 GD+ $23; *Millie The Lovable Monster* #4 VG/F $1; *Millie The Model* #4 FN+ $52, #5 VG- $24, #6 FA $16, #10 GD $23, #14 G/VG $20, #19 G/VG $27; *Miss America* V7 #27 GD $4; *Mitzi Comics* #1 FN $42; *Movie Love* #1 VG $10, #6 GD $5, #17 VG/F $20; *Mr District Attorney* #46 VG $13, #47 VG $8, #54 VG $12, #55 VG $9, #60 VG $7; *My Love* #4 (Mar 1970) VF $6; *My Love Secret* #53 FN $10; *My Personal Problem* #1 GD $12, #3 VG $12, #4 FN- $17; *My Secret Life* #27 VF/NM $5, #34 VF $5; *My Secret Marriage* #19 VG+ $8, #8 G/VG $10; *Naza Stone Age Warrior* #8 VG $1, #9 VG $1; *Nellie The Nurse* #3 VG $21, #6 VG+ $29, #12 PR/FA $13, #13 VG $33, #14 VG- $24, #17 VG+ $32, #21 GD- $10, *Nurse Betsy Crane* #23 G/VG $3; *Oscar* #25 (#2) FN $24, #7 VG $20; *Our Love Story* #3 VF- $12; *Patsy Walker* #2 VG $34, #4 GD $21, #7 VG+ 22, #8 VG/F $37, #9 FN- $21, #11 G/VG $21, #13 GD $10, #15 VG/F $27, #16 PR $3, #17 VG $31, #18 VG- $16, #20 FN- $27, #22 VG+ $10, #23 VG/F $36, #24 VG+ $12; *Real Clue Crime Stories* V7 #3 VG/F $5, V7 #10 VG+ $5, *Revealing Romances* #1 G/VG $14, #4 FN $15; *Romance Tales* #9 VG/F $11; *Romantic Confessions* #1 VG $10, *Romantic Hearts* #3 VG $12, #5 FA/GD $4, #6 VG+ $13; *Romantic Secrets* #8 VG $5, #30 G/VG $10, #38 G/VG $10; *Romantic Story* #12 VG+ $7, #16 VG+ $7, #80 VF- $5; *Rusty Comics* #13 VG- $16, #18 VG $14; *Secret Story Romance* #15 VG $6; *Secrets Of Love and Marriage* #1 GD $4, #17 NM- $10; *Space Family Robinson* #18 VG $2, #20 FN $2, #22 VG/F $2; *Spirit Promo Section* #1 of 9 (1940s insurance premium) VF $9, #2 VF $9, #3 VG+ $9, #4 VF $10, #5 VF $10, #6 VG+ $11, #7 VG+ $11, #8 VF $5, #9 VF $11; *Superior Stories* #3 VG $3; *Suzie* #49 (#1) FA/GD $21; *Sweetheart Diary* #44 VF $8, #52 VF $5; *Sweethearts* V2 #26

VG $10; *Target Western Romances* #1 GD+ $13; *Teen Comics* #23 FA/GD $16, #25 FA/GD $34, #35 VG $12; *Tender Love Stories* #1 FN- $16; *Tender Romance* #1 VG $16; *Three Nurses* #19 VG- $7; *Three Stooges* #1 (FC #1043) VG $10; *Thrilling Comics* #69 G/VG $50; *Tom Corbett Space Cadet* #7 GD $4; *Tony Trent* #4 VG $8; *Top Love Stories* #4 VG $18, #17 VG+ $21; *Top Love Stories Tor 3-D* #2 VG $7; *True Life Secrets* #23 VG/F $21; *True Life Tales* #2 PR/FA $4; *True Love Confessions* #3 GD $7; *True Love Pictorial* #5 FA+ $21, #8 VG $16, #11 G/VG $35; *True Love Problems and Advice* #13 VG+ $3, #40 VF $5; *True Secrets* #11 (Nov 51) GD/VG $6; *True to Life Romances* #15 VG- $16; *True War Romances* #21 FN+ $11; *Twilight Zone* #20 VF+ $11; *Vampirella* #1 VF- $172, #2 VF $45, #3 F/VF $136, #36 NM- $10, Annual #1 VF $103; *Western Outlaws* #2 G/VG $11; *Western Outlaws and Sheriffs* #67 G/VG $8; *Wilbur* #13 FA $10, #14 FA/GD $10, #18 GD- $10, #19 VG+ $31, #20 VG+ $30, #22 VG/F $5, #29 VG $20; *Winnie Winkle* #3 VG $9; *Young Love* #23 VG+ $18, #27 VG- $10, V2 #8 G/VG $10, #102 FN $5, #121 F/VF $6; *Young Romance* #38 VG $10, #39 VG+ $18, #44 FA/GD $8, #54 FA/GD $7, #151 VF- $7; *Zane Grey Outlaw Trail* FC #511 NM- $23.

That wraps it up for this time. Remember Collect what you enjoy and enjoy what you collect and you will always be satisfied with your hobby. Thank you.

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Chicago was far better than I thought it would be this year Usually it has a slower tempo if it takes place after San Diego Comic Con, but maybe that trend is changing. Maybe the weary and desperate that seek a major comic show make their way to Chi-Town to spend like the wild collectors they were this year.

Business was very brisk for my son Albert and I all weekend with very little time to goof off on Sunday like I usually do. You know, wandering around and spending money you really should not be spending on books you really do *not* need in your inventory. Silver Age were the demand books for us at this show and we sold key after key all weekend.

My trip would have been much better if I only had about 200 VF copies of *Spider Man* #129 to sell to the asking hordes. By far this book outstripped the demand for *Hulk* #181 and *X-Men* issues that were in demand in the past. I guess the movie hype is driving it along in crazy sales. Remember people, it is now much harder to sell a *DD* #168 than before the movie hit, these are *not* great long-term investments.

Chicago always makes the impression on me that it is really at heart a COMIC BOOK SHOW. Just walk around the room and see the tons of comics that are dragged in here and wait until Sunday and see how many run up to Brenda to sign up for next year. The show that may give this one a run for its title of COMIC SHOW may be the growing Baltimore Con that is fast approaching in September. It also has just been a powerhouse in regards to moving back issue material.

Ebay, well, we have not posted in a few months due to our schedule of shows that included SD and Wizard. We have just started posting this week and will work ourselves into a frenzy until close to Christmas and another break from work.

Sales? We sold and traded some of the following: *Fantastic Four* #1 GD/VG $1800, #2 VG+ $800; *Lady Luck* #86 VG/FN $260; *Spirit Section* #1 GD $210; *SGT Fury* #1 8.5 $1975; *Rex The Wonder Dog* #1 GD $100, *Phantom Lady* #5 VG $300; *Mickey in Disneyland* Dell Giant 9.2 $420; *Amazing Spider-Man* #129 VG/FN $185; a stack of *Shadow* Pulps for $300.

Buying?? Chicago is the easiest place I have found to spend way too much money on comics. Lots of books walk in and lots of dealers have comics at decent prices. Let's hope that with the stock markets new energy boost that the comic and collectors markets will get even better for the rest of the year.

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It's late September here in wonderful weather San Diego! School has started bringing in new and seasonal customers. Always a pleasure to see new blood at the store showing interest in our back issues. As always, we see intense desire for Bronze and Silver Age Marvels. Grades matter on these comics. But, availability keeps our market strong for those Marvels in all grades and with little discounting.

At the other end of the spectrum, I'm seeing a less than average interest in 1960s-70s Gold Keys and Dells. They sit in our store display boxes even when discounted half price. It kills me that some of those unique TV/movie-based comics that used to be in demand have been left behind by collectors that were not alive when those shows were on the screen. The usual suspects still lag in the market (Dell funny animal, western comics, etc.). I believe that *The Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide* is partially to blame. Without argument, the prices stated year after year in that book have pulled these comics fiscally away from the reaches of those buyers that are tempted to buy. There are exceptions that get *Guide* prices (however, we rarely seem to own any). Not enough reason to prevent *Overstreet* from pushing back the clock on the values of things like *Jace Pearson, Texas Ranger* and *Bugs Bunny*.

Which brings up an interesting question—is the *Overstreet* committee prepared to ever substantially reduce prices on lackluster titles, reducing them to more realistic and obtainable prices? Is the committee concerned that such a gigantic move backward will set a negative trend impacting many dealers and owners? I'm referring to the grades that are in less than NM. Although, the Near Mints in these titles may not be that much more desirable than the lower grades unless discounted. I can't be certain and that can be the subject of a debate amongst the *Overstreet* grading people.

Our business owns a limited amount of these less interesting comics. I don't intend to own many more unless I can get them cheap. I cannot always guarantee I will get them for a little cash if the owners believe the *Overstreet* values are the real deal. Kind of a Catch 22 that pits *Overstreet*'s values against the values of comic collectors dutifully aware of the status of full price in the comic book marketplace. A comic book marketplace that seems to test *Overstreet*'s prices from the store level to the on-line network on an hourly basis.

Golden Age: *Adventure Comics* #121 FN $150, #192 G/VG $60; *Air Fighters* V2 #1 FN $165; *Animal Comics* #12 FN $50, #22 FN+ $35; *Batman* #36 G/VG $183; *Detective Comics* #127 F/VF $325, #139 FN- $145; *Roy Rogers* FC #124 VG/F $45; *Skyman* #2 FN $80.

Silver Age: *Action Comics* #285 F/VF $68; *Adventure Comics* #300 FN+ $162; *Amazing Spider-Man* #54 VF $66, #62 VF $50; *Batman* #109 VG/F $100, #123 VG/F $75; *Conan* #15 VF+ $30; *Detective Comics* #407 VF+ $35; *Fantastic Four* #3 VG $375, #13 VG/F $124, #20 VF- $224, #108 NM $36; *Iron Man* #4 VF $38; *Iron Man Annual* #1 VF+ $26; *Showcase* #73 VF $75, #74 F/VF $42; *Superman* #132 FN- $57, #146 F/VF $100.

Bronze Age: *Fantastic Four* #131 NM $15; *Planet of the Apes* magazine #24 NM $20, #29 NM $40, *Superman VS Muhammad Ali Treasury* C-56 VF $37; *Witzend* #1 FN $60, #2 F/VF $55, #3 FN $50, #4 F/VF $55; *X-Men* #94 FN $174, #110 NM $65.

Modern Age: *Daredevil* #168 CGC 8.5 VF+ $150, #181 NM $22; *X-Men* #266 VF $26.

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This market report will cover San Diego Comic-Con and Wizard Con, Chicago—the two largest shows that I do all year. Both shows were well attended and sales were very good. We had record sales at both shows. As usual we sold a little of everything at Comic-Con. The three biggest categories of sales were for DC Silver Age keys, Marvel Bronze Age, and Comic Magazines. The average sale was around $15 and very few items over $200 were sold. We also sold a large amount of TV/Movie, Archies and Funny Animal comics, most of these do not *Guide* for much but they add up at the end of the show. Wizard-Con, which is usually a buying show, was still that this year, but we were also surprised to have way above average sales this year. Some of the better sellers at this show were the lower grade Golden/Atomic Age DC comics and mid-grade Atlas. After the show we purchased a 12,000+-book collection from Ohio. This had good runs of mid-grade books from the mid 1950s to the late 1970s. The following are a few notable sales:

Golden Age: *Adventure Comics* #114 5.0 $140; *America's Best* #1 NBC 1.0 $85; *Batman* #104 6.5 $105, #107 6.0 $90; *Boy Commandos* #3 1.5 $70; *Captain America* #69 Mpgs 4.0 $335; *Captain Marvel Junior* #19 3.0 $75; *Exciting* #56 5.5 $170; *Flash Comics* #25 2.5 $112, *More Fun* #62 NC 0 5 $75, #105 T 4 5 $165; *Sun Girl* #3 3.5 $200; *Superboy* #9 WrFc 3.0 $112, #29 6.5 $110; *Superman* #4 NBC 1.5 $400; *USA Comics* #5 T 2.5 $425; *World's Finest* #3 2 0 $250, #28 NBC 1.0 $40, #66 Ls 3.0 $80; *Zip Comics* #18 3.5 $170.

Atomic Age: *Annie Oakley* #1 4.0 $100; *Astonishing* #11 WrFc 4.5 $50; *Atomic War* #3 PcBc 1.8 $55; *Detective* #200 PcFc 3.0 $100, #231 7.0 $230; *Four Frightened Women* #2 Digest-Size 5.0 $160; *Marvel Tales* #128 7.0 $170, #134 R.Q. Sale 7.0 $100; *Menace* #5 5.0 $150; *Mister Mystery* #10 6.0 $170; *Mystery in Space* #3 5.5 $150; *Popeye* #1 Rs 3.5 $40; *Sub-Mariner Comics* #38 5.5 $200; *Superman's Girlfriend Lois Lane* #1 Ls 3.0 $337; *Weird Terror* #6 3.0 $70, #7 3.5 $84, *White Indian* #11 Frazetta 5.0 $75, *Witchcraft* #2 3.5 $100.

Silver Age: *Amazing Spider-Man* #100 9.0 $140; *Aquaman* #1 6.0 $154; *Batman* #168 9.4 $126; *Brave and Bold* #34 WrFc 2.5 $150; *Challengers of the Unknown* #1 Sos 3.5 $300; *Daredevil* #18 9.2 $100; *Detective* #355 9.4 $80; *Green Lantern* V2 #1 6.5 $550; *Justice League of America* #72 9.4 $80, *Superboy* #49 5.0 $70; *Showcase* #9 (Lois Lane) at 2.0 $400, #3 Sos 3.0 $110; *Tales of Suspense* #11 CGC (off-white pages) 7.0 $230.

Magazines, etc.: *Amazing World of DC* #9 9.2 $50; *Creepy* #27 7.0 $12; *Daredevil* #181 9.6 $50; *Famous Monsters of Filmland* #46 6.0 $15, #48 6.0 $25, *Savage Tales* #3 9.4 $16, #4 7.0 $12; *TMNT* #2 1st print 6.0 $15, #3 1st print 9.0 $25; *Savage Sword of Conan* #1 4.5 $16, #128 9.2 $7, #40 9.2 $9, #198 9.0 $9; *Comix International* #5 8.0 $16; *Marvel Graphic Novel*, ASM nn 9.4 $10.

Opinions expressed in CBM *"Market Reports" are solely those of the individual dealers and collectors who contribute them. Prices vary by location, date of transaction and other factors.*

Book Review

by Paul Gravett

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THE SLINGS & ARROWS COMIC GUIDE
Second Edition
(2003: Slings & Arrows Ltd., Great Britain) $39.95
ISBN 0-9544589-0-7

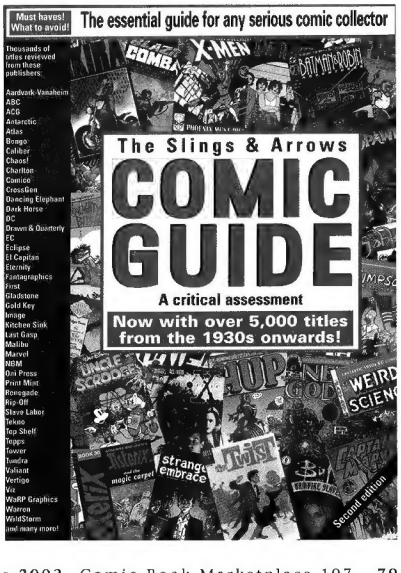
I think it can help sometimes to have an "outsider's" perspective. There has been a rich tradition of knowledgeable and entertaining comics criticism in the British fanzine press for years. We Brits do seem to have a slightly different take on American comic books, less reverent perhaps, maybe because we also come out of our own comics traditions and are closer to Europe, geographically at least. Out of this British comics culture, a cadre of seasoned critics was assembled six years ago by Frank Plowright, former co-organizer of the much-missed UK and Glasgow Comic Art Conventions. They undertook the daunting task of reviewing and evaluating an enormous quantity of comics, mainly American but with several British examples and European and Japanese translations.

The resulting 1997 *Slings & Arrows Comics Guide* from Aurum Press stretched to some 700 pages and was a landmark reference book but was soon out of print. This year brings a new, updated and expanded edition, self-published by Frank, totaling nearly 800 pages and with a smaller type size in order to fit even more entries and opinions about every American comic series "of note" published from the 1960s through to December 2002, and many dating back to the early 20th century.

Anyone who has lost themselves wandering through the pages of the *The Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide* or the Gerber *Photo-Journal Guides* has some sense of just how many thousands of comics past and present have been published. To cope with this volume, *The Slings & Arrows Comic Guide* imposed some sane criteria to make this survey manageable. Mostly excluded are comics so rare they couldn't get hold of them—perhaps their website could put up a wish list and collectors might loan them in time for the next edition? They omit comics produced for young children "unlikely to have wider appeal," so you'll find Donald Duck, Fox & Crow, Tintin, Scooby Doo and Asterix, but Little Lulu, Rocky & Bullwinkle, or the vast Harvey output, for example, are not included, at least not yet. They also leave out most collections of single-tier gag newspaper strips, so there's no *Peanuts*, *Mutts* or *Calvin & Hobbes*, but *Popeye*, *Pogo*, *Krazy Kat* and others are well covered.

What are also present are insightful and practical critiques of over 5,000 titles from A1 to ZZZ, from the mainstream to obscure indie and small press titles often not listed in *Overstreet*. What are also here are many assessments that go back well before the Sixties—entire runs of ECs, Gleason's *Daredevil* and *Crime and Punishment* (though curiously not *Boy Comics*), DC's vintage super-hero and war comics, even *Marvel Mystery* back to 1939 and *Little Nemo in Slumberland* back to 1905. And there's generous coverage of underground comix, alternative titles and graphic novels. Check out the website, www.slingsandarrowspublishing.com for some sample entries.

For any comics reader, this book is unputdownable. Every page brims with facts and points of view, familiar and unfamiliar series. The length of each



entry ranges from a pithy sentence or two, covering a dizzying variety of one-offs and short runs, to meaty three- or four-page essays, reviewing nearly 800 issues of *Action Comics* or the entire graphic novel output of Fantagraphics. At the end of positive reviews are listed those issues the reviewer particularly recommends. There is also an invaluable creator index to help you track down your favorite writer's or artist's most obscure efforts.

One departure from the first edition is a welcome 16-page color section. This presents revealing covers and personal notes by each of the sixteen reviewers naming their favorite comics. There are also the results of their poll to name Ten Good Comics in the categories of adventure, all-ages, anthologies, autobiographical, crime, funny, historical, horror and supernatural, science fiction, slice of life, super-hero, war and western. They also pick ten graphic novels, ten good comics "that really should be collected" and ten "that you've never heard of."

Some of the most entertaining reviews are the shortest, often wittily worded and savagely damning. Inevitably, you are not going to agree with every comment written here, but that is all part of the fun. After all, reading comics is a very subjective business and there is no accounting for people's tastes. As with the previous edition, I found this book immensely practical. It spurred me into weeding out some of the substandard stuff clogging up my ever-expanding collection. But at the same time, I also found myself re-appreciating titles I'd forgotten, and adding more and more "must reads" to my want list, encouraged by the shrewd guidance of these reviewers.

By appraising so much of a medium, this guide has done for comics what Leonard Maltin or Siskel & Ebert have done for movies. A copy should sit on the bookshelf of every collector, novice and veteran alike. We all need a guide like this, to help find out not what a comic is worth, but whether it is worth reading. After all, shouldn't that be the true measure of a comic's "value"? CBM

Warren Kremer 1921-2003

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Versatile and prolific American illustrator Warren Kremer created Hot Stuff and Stumbo, as well as Richie Rich with publisher Alfred Harvey and editor Sid Jacobson, for New York publishers Harvey Comics and developed the quintessential appearances of a host of their enduring children's characters. Among them, Casper the Friendly Ghost and Richie Rich are most widely known today in their Nineties movie versions. But it was through more than three decades of million-selling Harvey comic books, many issues illustrated anonymously by Kremer, that they enjoyed their longest popularity.

The son of a sign painter, Kremer was born in the Mott Haven section of the Bronx, New York, in 1921 and graduated from the city's School of Industrial Arts. One of his teachers helped him secure a job with Ace Magazines, publishers of cheap newsprint fiction magazines or pulps. Here during World War II he produced layouts and lettering, glamorous dry brush drawings for romantic confessions titles and wash illustrations for aviation periodicals like *Air Trail Blazers* and *Heroes of the Air*. Ace was one of many pulp publishers to diversify into comic books and gave Kremer his first experience of the medium on the light comedy Hap Hazard. It was also at Ace that he met his wife Grace, who would letter the balloons in most of his comics; they married in 1947.

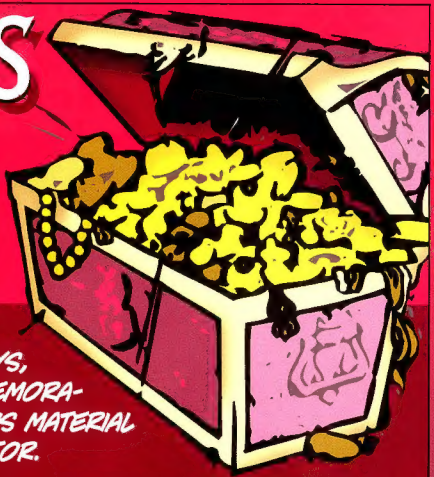
As the pulps declined and comic books took off, Kremer began freelancing for Harvey Comics. Skilled in a variety of styles, he drew new exploits of Joe Palooka, Humphrey and Little Max, derived from Ham Fisher's hugely successful boxing newspaper strip, and covers for reprints of *Mutt and Jeff*, *The Katzenjammer Kids* and other strips. Kremer was equally adept at realism on Harvey's war, romance and horror comics. He produced some of the most gratuitous horror covers and stories of the early Fifties, such as his disintegrating radiation victim on *Black Cat Mystery* #50. These only fueled the media panic about the supposed harmful effects of comics, which led in 1954 to televised Senate hearings and a self-imposed clean-up campaign by the industry.

Partly in response to this critical climate, Harvey Comics introduced a range of deliberately wholesome titles for the young in 1952 by buying first the comic book rights and eventually complete ownership of Paramount's animated properties, all except Popeye. To Casper the Friendly Ghost, Little Audrey, Baby Huey and others, Harvey would add brand new characters created 'in house', many of whom would be spun off into TV cartoons of their own. Kremer came to be the line's leading artist and art editor, penciling up to eight books a month, and his crisp, curvaceous brushwork in comics as well as merchandising and occasional animation storyboards defined the 'Harvey look'.

When the original Harvey company closed down in 1982, Kremer worked for Marvel Comics new children's imprint, Star Comics. Among others, he adapted the furry Star Wars creatures The Ewoks, George Gateley's crafty cat Heathcliff, and Hanna-Barbera's The Flintstone Kids and co-created space kid Planet Terry with writer Dave Manak. Kremer's final comics were based on Cosgrove Hall's Count Duckula, before a stroke rendered his drawing hand useless. With his wife Grace, herself an accomplished artist, he retired in 1989 to their home in New Jersey, where he died at age 82 after a short illness.

Warren Kremer, born in 1921, died July 24, 2003; survived by his wife, two sons, two daughters, a sister and two grandchildren.

TREASURES BEYOND IMAGINING



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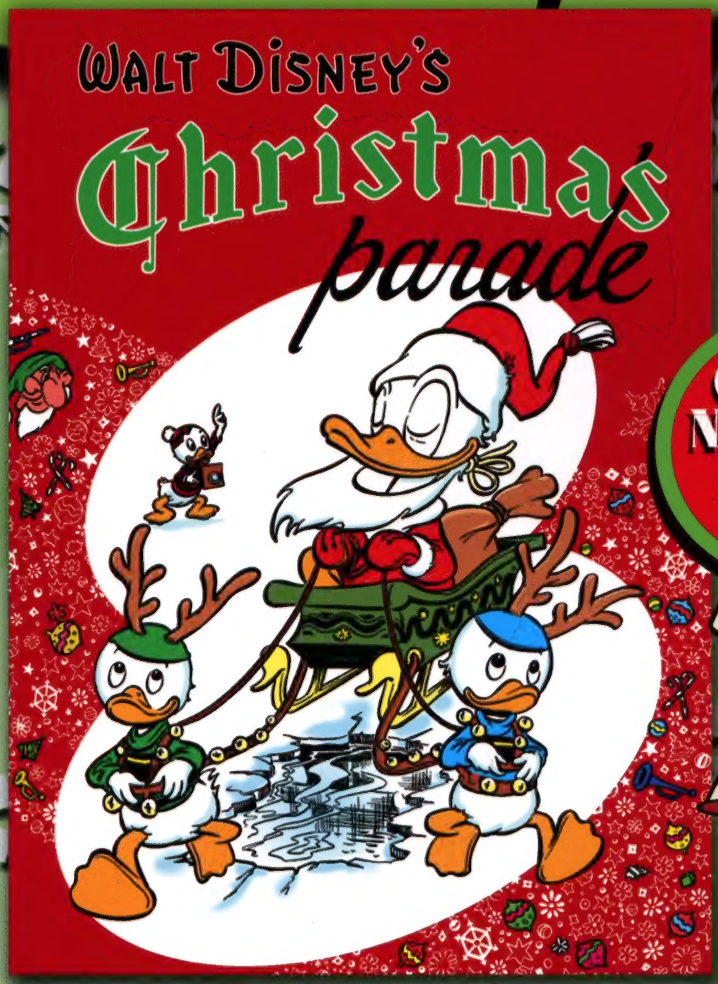

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